

Images of Life with Muhammad

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(Qasas Nabawiyyah)

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translated and edited by
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Dedication

To the one who was the first to teach me how to praise God; who instilled in my heart the concept of God's glory and the need to glorify Him; who nurtured my sense of love and respect of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him); who was the first to relate to me stories from the Prophet and to point out their significance and guidance.

To the one who reared me, set me on the right path, and gave me the right motivation. He imparted to me his life experience in my young years and through him God spared me failure and loss.

To my father I present this work, praying to God to grant him whatever good and continuous reward it merits. May his life be blessed and happy. May God reward him as He best rewards fathers for rearing their children.

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Preface

In the name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful. I pray to God to give all my readers peace, mercy and blessings, and offer them all a good and blessed greeting.

This book presents some of the best stories. It does not give a historical account of the life of Prophet Muhammad and relate its events. It simply selects scenes from his blessed life. When we take together the different reports of these scenes we find ourselves looking at superb images that portray absolute perfection. They testify that God gave His chosen Prophet the best shape and form and the most sublime morals and manners.

The reader will see splendid aspects of great morality, flawless personality, balanced and mutually complementary roles, as well as natural spontaneity. The simple and the great, the ideal and the practical combine together in a way that is absolutely free of pretension and affectation. Indeed, the Prophet steered away from these and warned against them: “I am not one to claim what I am not.” (38: 86)

This book is not meant as an author’s address to his readers; rather, both reader and author are contemplating wonderful scenes from the Prophet’s life. Together, we appreciate its lively interaction and its great achievements against the perfect background of the Prophet’s constant serenity. His was a happy life, honoured with hope and confidence in God and decorated with true feelings and emotions and noble pleasures.

With contemplation and good insight, the reader will discover new angles pointing out meanings other people have not read into. This should not come as a surprise. The Prophet’s life is like a flowing river: everyone draws of its water what their buckets can hold. Everyone should look at the scenes of the Prophet’s life with his or her heart, love and faith and they will see the most remarkable images shining before them. Thus, our tongues will spontaneously repeat God’s words: “God knows best whom to entrust with His message.” (6: 124) “God chooses message bearers from among the angels and from among men.” (22: 75)

May I request my readers to make their study of these paintings of scenes from the Prophet's life a joint study so that we may exchange their great meanings and imports. The scope of each scene is limitless and the angles to look at it are plentiful. As my readers peruse some of what I have seen, I am eager to know what they have seen. Together we are contemplating scenes from the life of God's messenger, the dearest person to our hearts, the one whom we respect most and to whom we owe the most important duty. His life story is the best to be related.

I pray that we truly love Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) so that we will be included in the happy prospect he gave us: "In the life to come, everyone will be with those they love."¹

¹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 6168; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2641.

1. At the Cave in the Depth of the Night

Across human history, God sent many messages to human communities, providing them with guidance and light. However, people tend to move away from divine guidance only to sink into error. There came a time for humanity when the light of divine messages had long been extinguished. Layers of darkness spread over the whole world with injustice and paganism adding further darkness and ignorance. It was a situation that incurred God's displeasure. As God looked upon mankind, He was displeased with them all, apart from a scattered minority of people clinging to His message.

That was the world scene when, in a remote corner of the earth a man walked alone, leaving the city where he lived and plodded along deserted pathways in between mountains. He aimed for a particular mountain he knew.

When we look at this mountain today and contemplate what happened there we feel as if God has created it for this particular person and this particular event. The many mountains around it slope easily, but it is the only one with a high peak that appears as if it wants to reveal something at a great distance. To climb to the top is very hard, and the way to it is rough. Yet at the top there is a cave. When that man sat in the cave and looked through the opening at the end, he saw the Ka`bah, the House built by his distant ancestor, Prophet Abraham, and dedicated it for worship.

There in his lofty position this man appears as though he elevates himself above the squalor and absurdity of paganism. He looks at the vast expanse of the universe and discerns the remaining traces of God's messages to mankind.

This place, awesome and towering as it is, is most suitable for deep contemplation. There, as we are overawed with the greatness of the universe around us, we engage in reflection on the creation of the heavens and earth and conclude as believers always say: "Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. Limitless are You in Your glory." (3: 191)

On a clear and very still night no whisper, no footsteps of man or animal interrupted the man's deep contemplation. He was all alone, comfortable in the stillness of the night, when all of a sudden the angel appeared to him. He neither expected nor aspired to any happenings. He neither hoped for nor dreamed of something being given to him. Least of all could he expect to receive a revelation or a scripture: "You could never hope that this Book would be conferred on you. But it came by your Lord's grace." (28: 86)

Such a situation would place even the most courageous of people in the grip of fear. The appearance of the angel was an absolute surprise, but what he said and what he required the man to do was an equal surprise. The angel said to him: "Read". He knew that he was giving this order to one who could never read a written word and never wrote one: "Never have you been able to read a book before this, nor have you ever been able to transcribe one with your right hand." (29: 48)

His answer was the only one he could give: "I am not a reader." The angel held him and pressed him very hard. Then he released him only to give him the same order: "Read". Once more he gave the same answer: "I am not a reader." He was practically telling him that he never learnt how to read. Yet the angel once more held him and pressed him very hard before releasing him. He then gave him the same order to read. Once more, the man gave the same answer, as it was the true answer. There was no change between the first and the third time, and he was still one who could not read. The angel held him and pressed him hard for the third time. He then released him and said to him: "Read in the name of your Lord who has created – created man out of a clinging cell mass. Read – for your Lord is the most Bountiful One, who has taught the use of the pen, taught man what he did not know." (96: 1-5)

These verses were engraved in word and meaning in the Prophet's consciousness. He hastened home, trembling with fear, until he reached his wife, Khadijah, and said "Cover me; cover me." His was a traumatic experience and he needed to calm himself. When he settled down and his fear subsided, he related what happened to him to his wife. He also related to her what he heard and understood. She was a caring and rational woman who loved

him dearly and gave him sound advice. He told her all that he felt, stating: "I fear for myself."

Straightaway, she gave him a clear and categorical answer with total conviction: "By God, He will not let you suffer any humiliation."

We can almost hear the universe, with its angels, celestial bodies and great creatures echoing Khadijah's words of reassurance: "By God, He has not given you this revelation, sending you a messenger to inform you of your role, choosing you from among all mankind only to let you suffer humiliation or leave you in grief. He has chosen you in order to honour you and bestow His honour on mankind through you. He will elevate you and make you the cause of elevating humanity. He wants to give you ease at heart and high renown. Do not fear for yourself, for God will never let you suffer any humiliation.

* * *

1. The more we contemplate this scene the greater is our insight into the significance of this event. Without exaggeration, this is the greatest event in human history, from the moment the first man stepped on earth until the end of human life. The course of history has never moved as it moved then, and humanity was never happier with an event like it was with this one. I do not know of any occasion that is worth celebrating or being grateful for as this occasion. Hence, it has been commemorated with a special mention in the Qur'an: "It was in the month of Ramadan that the Qur'an was revealed: a guidance for mankind." (2: 185) This refers to the fact that the first revelation of the Qur'an was on this occasion that took place in Ramadan. Hence, Prophet Muhammad and the angel Gabriel commemorated it every year as they met to recite the Qur'an to each other. "The Prophet was at his most generous in the month of Ramadan when Gabriel met him and they read the Qur'an together."² Until the end of time, every year, in the month of Ramadan, the memory of the first revelation and the meeting

² Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 6; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2308.

between the Prophet and the Holy Spirit is renewed for God's messenger and his Muslim community.

2. God is most gracious, most generous. He bestowed endless grace on humanity when He looked at mankind, revealed His word and addressed His message to them. He chose one of their numbers, the one with the purest heart and greatest compassion, to receive His word and deliver it to them. This is all a bounty granted by the grace of God. It was neither earned nor requested by people. It was He who decided to give them such everlasting bounty.

Can we feel what it means that God Almighty, the Most High, has chosen to speak to mankind? The whole universe is only part of His creation, yet He looks at man who lives on earth which is no more than a particle floating in the great expanse of the universe, and gives man His words that constitute man's religion and guidance through life. What a great bounty He has given man! How great is the honour man receives through this revelation!

3. God's messenger (peace be upon him) was overwhelmed by fear at the first meeting with the angel Gabriel. He went straight home as fast as he could, trembling and agitated. This in itself is evidence of the truth of his prophethood and that what he received was in no way expected or aspired to: "You could never hope that this Book would be conferred on you. But it came by your Lord's grace." (28: 86) Yet at that time, there were people among the Jews and the Arabs who rejected paganism and some who expected the advent of a prophet. They might have aspired to be chosen for the task. However, in His infinite wisdom, God does not grant this honour to a person who awaits or expects it, but to the one who is worthy of it and can undertake the great tasks it involves: "God knows best whom to entrust with His message." (6: 124)

4. "Read in the name of your Lord who has created – created man out of a clinging cell mass. Read – for your Lord is the most Bountiful One, who has taught the use of the pen, taught man what he did not know." (96: 1-5) These were the very first verses of the Qur'an revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Every word and phrase in them is deliberately chosen. Hence, we can discern the definite purpose for such choice. We may highlight a few points here:

- a. These verses start with an order to read and stress the importance of the pen and the book. Yet this is revealed to an unlettered Prophet who neither wrote nor read anything written. Had this unlettered person chosen his revelations or invented them — and far be it from him to do so — he would not have started with highlighting and publicizing something he lacked. Thus, this very first verse is a proof of his prophethood and that he was a messenger of God receiving what was revealed to him.
- b. The first verse says: “Read in the name of your Lord who has created.” Thus it includes all God’s creation throughout the universe. The second verse specifies a particular creation: “created man out of a clinging cell mass.” These verses point to a great fact and give reassurance to the Prophet as they put all his future enemies in their proper place. All of them are creatures, but the Prophet is given his message by the Creator. What significance may be attached to them when the message is given to the Prophet by their Creator?
- c. “Read, and your Lord is the most Bountiful One.” (96: 3) We note the superlative attribute that suggests an endless bounty. The bounty He has granted to Prophet Muhammad includes the revelations He vouchsafed to him and choosing him from among all mankind to be the recipient. This verse tells the Prophet that God’s bounty includes the care God takes of him. When people deny his message and stand opposed to him, he remembers that his message comes from the most Bountiful One who will never abandon him or let him suffer any humiliation. How splendid is this reassurance from God who tells him to read and assures him that his Lord is most bountiful. Then the same reassurance is given by his wife who tells him: “By God, He will never let you suffer any humiliation.”

- d. “Who has taught the use of the pen.” (96: 4) This unlettered Prophet was given revelations full of knowledge. Thousands of scholars have written many thousands of books explaining and studying the knowledge and the legislation God revealed to Muhammad. They are studied by millions in every generation. Yet he never read or wrote anything. Scholars learn what other scholars have written, but God’s messenger, the unlettered Prophet, taught mankind what to write.

2. The Chosen Elite

The first meeting of Prophet Muhammad with the Holy Spirit at Hira' Cave signalled the beginning of divine revelations. The Prophet went back home trembling in fear. An aspect of God's grace was that he went home to a wise woman, his wife Khadijah. Once he reported to her what happened and told her of his feelings, "I fear for myself", she gave him a firm and decisive answer. Her answer highlighted a divine law which her wisdom and experience had subconsciously showed her. She knew her husband well after having lived with him for fifteen years and was fully aware of his inner feelings and true morals. Hence, her answer was quick and decisive, stressed by an oath that suggested unshaken belief in what she said: "By God, He will never let you suffer any humiliation, because you are kind to your relatives, you speak the truth, you assist anyone in need, you are hospitable to your guests and you help in every just cause."

Khadijah, the Mother of the Believers, tells of a divine law: God protects those people who are keen to be of benefit to people, letting them suffer no humiliation or grief. Indeed God gives them such a benevolent nature so that they merit His kindness. As she said those words, Khadijah highlighted the fact that such was the nature of Muhammad ever since he was a young man and long before he started to receive divine revelations. People of exemplary conduct like him are not left to be humiliated. When we look at Muhammad's qualities highlighted by his wife, we realize that their common denominator is kindness to people, looking after them, and taking care of their needs: a relative is kindly treated, a disabled person is taken care of, the one in need is assisted, a guest is welcomed and shown hospitality, and anyone with a just cause is given help.³

These qualities are the essence of noble ethics upheld by people who have compassionate hearts that share others' problems, identify their needs and extend a helping hand to relieve their distress. These were natural qualities of Muhammad, long before he

³ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3; Muslim, *hadith* No. 160. Vis. al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 200.

was given revelations. His wife, Khadijah, recognized them through their close association.

We may recall another scene that shows the same fact. The scene is that of Moses (peace be upon him) when he stopped at a water spring in Madyan. He found the people bringing their flocks of sheep to the water, but he noticed two women keeping their sheep from going near it. This was a strange scene and he went up to the two women for an explanation: "He asked them: 'What is the matter with you two?' They said: 'We cannot water [our animals] until the herdsmen return home and our father is a very old man.'" (28: 23) What caused Moses to find fault with the situation he was looking at? It was his ethical stand that required that the weaker element should be given priority, not left to the end. Hence, he immediately took charge of the two women's flock and watered them. He quickly took the initiative showing the proper response as felt by a man of integrity and good morality. As the Qur'an relates the event, it implies prompt action by Moses to redress the situation. The scene is full of amazing elements. Moses, a stranger who has just arrived in a land that is unknown to him, finds himself alone among these people. He had to flee from his hometown having had no time to prepare for a long journey. He was chased across the desert by a ruthless enemy. In this situation he must have been preoccupied with what may happen to him in this new place. Yet, he could not help enquire about a situation that was odd according to his moral standards. He responded according to his instinctive ethics and helped the two women who were ignored by their own folk and neighbours.

Such scenes make clear that God chooses great people to deliver His great messages. One of the most important aspects of the greatness of these people is their care for their fellow human beings. They take up their cases and strive hard to fulfil their needs. Their compassion makes them the apparent resort sought by those who are vulnerable or powerless. Everyone with a problem finds them helpful and compassionate. Hence, assigning to them the task to save humanity from error and to guide mankind to the truth is met with an eager desire to help and benefit people.

This is a fact clearly seen in the lives of God's prophets and messengers, (peace be upon them all). It should also be clearly

present among the heirs to the prophets, namely religious scholars. The more they adhere to the ethics of the prophets, the better they reflect their heritage. Scholars and advocates of Islam must be deeply involved in the affairs of their communities, so that people will come to them with their needs. They should take up people's cases and endeavour to sort out their problems. When they are compassionate to people, they realize that they reflect God's grace, as He says to the Prophet: "It is by God's grace that you deal gently with them." (3: 159) Otherwise, their role in their communities will be limited and their effect negligible.

One of the happiest things that my colleagues and I have experienced was that we were in close contact with one of the leading scholars of our times, Shaikh Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz. In his conduct, he reflected the perfect harmony between the ethics of the Prophet and his scholarly heritage. He was keen to practically follow the Prophet's guidance in all situations. He used all his personal resources, prestige and money to bring benefit to people and help them with their needs, and to educate them and show them the right way. Hence, he was very effective and assumed a status that other scholars rarely achieve. In my view, people who strongly influence the Muslim community are only those who combine knowledge of Islam with following the ethical guidance of the prophet. Through them God extends His grace to people and provides them with an assured resort.

3. The Loving Uncle

As a young child opening up to the world around him, Muhammad realized that his uncle, Abu Talib, was his closest adult. He was the full brother of his father, `Abdullah, on whom he never set eyes. He was the one to undertake his upbringing after the death of his grandfather, `Abd al-Muttalib. Abu Talib was so kind that he became Muhammad's second father, and Muhammad was often referred to as "Abu Talib's orphan."

Their love was mutual. Abu Talib held his nephew in such high regard that he took him on his travels. When he wanted to travel to Syria, he took him along even though Muhammad was only nine at the time. At such a young age, such a long business trip was too hard for a child. It was only possible because both uncle and nephew were so attached to each other. When he undertook the task of delivering God's message, with all the hardship that it involved, Abu Talib was the one who supported and protected him. He bore with fortitude all the difficulties their people placed in his way, allowing no weakness to creep into him. Abu Talib never wavered in his decision to give his nephew unlimited support.

The scene we will now look at took place ten years after the start of the Islamic message. The Prophet was 50 years of age, while his uncle Abu Talib was 85 and bedridden. The Prophet visited him and found with him other relatives including Abu Jahl, the archenemy of Islam, `Abdullah ibn Abi Umayyah and al-Musayyib ibn Hazn. The Prophet realized that his uncle was about to die and he urged him to make the declaration he often tried to persuade him to make. He was like a dutiful son appealing to his father: "Uncle, I owe you the greatest duty, as you have been the kindest person to me. Say the word that enables me to intercede with God on your behalf on the Day of Judgement. Uncle, say: 'there is no deity but God'. It is the word that gives me the argument to make for you." Abu Jahl immediately played on Abu Talib's emotions, highlighting his tribal family duties and urging him to stick to his father's religion: "Will you abandon `Abd al-Muttalib's faith?"

The Prophet felt as if in a race with the approaching death. Ignoring Abu Jahl, he repeated his appeal: "Uncle, say, 'there is no

deity other than God', so that I can testify for you in front of God." Again Abu Jahl reminded him to stick to his father's religion. The Prophet made a further urgent appeal at this point and his uncle felt his appeal to be very genuine. He spoke to him: "Nephew, if it were not for the Quraysh heaping shame on me and saying that I am only saying it for fear of death, I would have said it to please you." His last words before his death were: "I follow the religion of my elders; I follow `Abd al-Muttalib's religion." He refused to say that there is no deity other than God.

When Abu Talib died, the Prophet left feeling very sorry that his uncle whom loved and supported him did not enjoy the guidance he advocated. As if his uncle could hear him, he referred to him saying: "I shall pray for your forgiveness unless I am forbidden to do so." God later revealed to him: "It is not for the Prophet and the believers to pray for the forgiveness of those who associate partners with God, even though they may be their close relatives, after it has become clear that they are destined for the blazing fire." (9: 113) To give the Prophet comfort and solace, God also revealed to him: "Indeed, you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love. It is God who guides whom He wills. He knows best those who are guided aright." (28: 56) The Prophet continued to grieve for his uncle, and his close companions were aware of this.

Ten years later, the Prophet took over Makkah. Its population went up to him in queues, pledging their loyalty and declaring their belief in Islam. Abu Bakr brought his own father, Abu Quhafah, to pledge himself as a loyal Muslim. The old man stretched his thin hand towards the Prophet. As Abu Bakr saw his father shaking hands with the Prophet, his eyes were tearful. The Prophet wondered why he should cry at that moment. He asked him the reason and Abu Bakr said: "Messenger of God, had it been your uncle's hand instead of his hand, and had your uncle become a Muslim giving you pleasure, I would have been happier than I am today happy with my father becoming a Muslim. By Him who sent you with the message of the truth, I would have been happier with Abu Talib, rather than my father becoming a Muslim; and this only to please you."

Today, we feel very sorry that Abu Talib had not witnessed that day when his nephew, the Prophet, took over Makkah

peacefully. He would have seen people coming in groups to declare themselves believers in Islam. We would have loved that Abu Talib had given the Prophet the utmost pleasure by becoming a Muslim, but “it is God who guides whom He wills.” (28: 56)

* * *

1. I have often wondered who should have been the first person to accept the message of Islam and to confirm his acceptance of the truth of Muhammad’s message. The rational answer was always that Abu Talib should have been the first.

He knew his nephew as no one ever knew him. He knew him as a child, youth, young man, adult and as a middle aged person. He knew his character and qualities: his honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, purity, and he knew him in public and private. It was Abu Talib who proudly said of him: “They all know that our son is truthful and he never utters a falsehood.” Yet the Prophet’s repeated appeal to his uncle over a period of ten years remained unsuccessful. Abu Talib died when the Prophet was by his bedside, repeating his appeal to declare his belief in God’s oneness, but he did not. Had he said it, he would have been happy and he would have given the Prophet, as well as every Muslim, genuine happiness.

This provides clear evidence that guidance is a gift from God which He bestows on anyone. In His infinite wisdom, God knows best who deserves His guidance. We know that some people accepted the Prophet’s message and declared their acceptance of Islam in their first meeting with the Prophet.

Appreciating this, Muslims realize that God gives them a great blessing when He helps them to follow His guidance, when a large number of people continue to be in error. Hence, we appeal to God in every *rak`ah* of every prayer: “Guide us on the right path.” (1: 6) Had knowledge been enough on its own to achieve guidance, Abu Talib, with his long and first-hand knowledge of the Prophet, would have been the first to have it. “It is God who guides whom He wills. He knows best those who are guided aright.” (28: 56)

2. The case of Abu Talib gives consolation to anyone who tries hard to advocate Islam and fails, despite being very keen, to achieve

a personal goal. The Prophet was the most keen to win his uncle over to Islam. His was the wisest method and the most effective admonition. Yet his uncle did not accept his appeals. Much earlier, Prophet Noah tried hard with his son and Prophet Abraham with his father, but they were similarly unsuccessful. The cases of these prophets with their relatives should comfort every advocate of Islam who tries hard with his own relatives but fails to win them over to the truth.

3. In the above-quoted Qur'anic verse, God does not mention Abu Talib by name or nickname or relation to the Prophet. He only refers to him by the Prophet's feelings towards him: "whom you love". This is a natural feeling the Prophet experienced toward a relative who had done him numerous favours. It is in human nature that we love those who are kind to us. The Prophet acknowledged his uncle's favours and loved him dearly. Hence, he was most keen that his uncle should follow divine guidance.

Instinctive love of relatives and kind people of integrity, even though they may not be Muslims, is part of sound human nature. The Prophet clearly had such love towards his uncle.

4. We note that Abu Jahl imposed an emotional siege on Abu Talib at this critical moment of his life. He did not oppose the Prophet's appeal with any argument. Nor did he provide proof in support of his stance. He only sought to remind Abu Talib that his father followed the pagan religion. His logic was devoid of any proof, but made a strong emotional appeal. He wanted Abu Talib to feel that he would be betraying his ancestors if he were to abandon their religion. This was a ploy Abu Jahl used numerous times in different situations.

We note that Abu Jahl's method is followed by many of those who follow his line. Their debate is akin to a guerrilla warfare, with no rules and no clear position.

It should also be noted that two of those three who stood by Abu Talib's sick bed, urging him to remain an unbeliever, ultimately accepted Islam and abandoned `Abd al-Muttalib's religion. These were `Abdullah ibn Abi Umayyah, who was a martyr in the Battle of Hunayn, and al-Musayyib ibn Hazn.

5. The Prophet's serenity and gentleness at this critical moment of his uncle's life is remarkable. When he offered him divine guidance and found Abu Jahl resorting to utmost provocation the Prophet did not stop to counter Abu Jahl's argument. No report suggests that the Prophet answered him even with a single word. Perhaps Abu Jahl wanted the Prophet to answer him so that he could divert the Prophet's attention. The Prophet, however, did not fall for that, but continued with what he wanted. He urged his uncle with all kindness until God's will was done and his uncle died. The Prophet remained calm despite his profound sorrow and grief for his uncle. His only comment was: "I shall pray for your forgiveness unless I am forbidden to do so." He did not bother with giving Abu Jahl a word.

The Prophet's calm attitude in such a provocative yet critical situation teaches us that we should not waste time and energy in pursuing what is futile. We must not allow our opponents to drag us into side issues that divert us from our main purpose. At the same time, the Prophet's attitude reflects his sublime moral values. God says of him: "Most certainly, yours is a sublime character." (68: 4)

4. My Lord, Avenge Me

The event took place nearly 30 years earlier, yet it appears to him as if it is taking place now. We see him at his office in Kufa, in southern Iraq, where he is the state treasurer for the whole province, speaking to a group of Muslims of the second generation. The very fact that he is reporting this event to those people in his particular position is highly significant.

The man was `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud, one of the early Muslims. He was a young lad working as a shepherd for some of the dignitaries of Makkah when he met the Prophet and accepted Islam. In the social hierarchy of the Makkan society, he was in a vulnerable position and he could not defend himself against abuse by such people. The event he was relating took place several years after his adoption of Islam, when Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle had died. After his death, the unbelievers of the Quraysh escalated their pressure on the Prophet and went much further in trying to physically harm him than they ever did during his uncle's lifetime. `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud was speaking of an event he witnessed happening to the Prophet in Makkah on a day when he stood up to pray at the Ka`bah. His prayer was long: when he stood up reciting the Qur'an he took a long time, as he did with his *ruku`* [i.e. bowing] and his prostration. Abu Jahl was present, sitting with a number of the chiefs of the Quraysh who were all unbelievers. `Abdullah remembered them and mentioned their names as if looking at them. They were `Utbah ibn Rabi`ah, Shaybah ibn Rabi`ah, al-Walid ibn `Utbah, Umayyah ibn Khalaf, `Umarah ibn al-al-Walid and `Uqbah ibn Abi Mu`ayt.

The day before, some camels were slaughtered in a nearby area of Makkah. When Abu Jahl saw the Prophet staying long in his prostration during his prayer, he said to his friends: "Which of you would be prepared to take the stomach, intestine and blood of the camel slaughtered yesterday and put it on Muhammad's back when he prostrates himself?" They appeared to be taken aback at his suggestion, but the worst of them, `Uqbah ibn Abi Mu`ayt, volunteered to do it, went to the place and brought some of that dirt. He waited until the Prophet prostrated himself and threw the dirt on his back, between his shoulders. The rest were laughing

aloud, to the extent that some of them bent over the others as they laughed. They felt that they could laugh at the Prophet's misfortune. The Prophet continued in his prostration, without lifting his head.

`Abdullah ibn Mas`ud added: "I was standing by, feeling my powerlessness that I could not even take that dirt off the Prophet's back. I had no clan to protect me and I feared them. Had I had any support, I would have taken the dirt off God's messenger's back. However, someone went to tell his daughter, Fatimah, who was just a young girl. She came and took it off his back. She went up to those people of the Quraysh and verbally abused them, praying to God to punish the perpetrators. They made no reply to her. The Prophet lifted his head as he always did when he finished his prostration. When he finished his prayer, he raised his voice as he praised and glorified God. He then uttered a little prayer: "My Lord, I appeal to You against the Quraysh." He said this three times. When they heard him saying this prayer, they stopped laughing and felt afraid. They used to think that prayers in their city were always answered. He then said: "My Lord, I appeal to You against Abu al-Hakam ibn Hisham [i.e. Abu Jahl], `Utbah ibn Rabi`ah, Shaybah ibn Rabi`ah, al-Walid ibn `Utbah, Umayyah ibn Khalaf, `Uqbah ibn Abi Mu`ayt and `Umarah ibn al-Walid." He mentioned all seven by name. `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud said: "I never saw him praying against them except on that day."

Less than five years later, all these people were part of the unbelievers' army which left Makkah, full of arrogance, aiming to subdue God's messenger and the Muslims. That was the Battle of Badr which ended in a resounding victory for the Muslims. The much larger army of the unbelievers suffered a humiliating defeat. After the battle, the Prophet said: "Who will find out what happened to Abu Jahl?" `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud said: "I will, messenger of God." He went around to see if he was killed. He found him badly wounded and in the throes of death. He held his beard and said to him: "Are you Abu Jahl? All praise be to God who has humiliated you, you enemy of God." Abu Jahl asked him: "Tell me the outcome: is victory ours?" `Abdullah said: "Victory belongs to God and His messenger." Thus, `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud saw Abu Jahl humiliated and defeated as he saw him in Makkah arrogant and tyrannical. As for the other six included in the Prophet's prayer, `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud said: "By Him who sent

Muhammad with the message of the truth, I saw all those named by the Prophet killed in Badr. The sun changed their colour, as the day was very hot. They were then dragged into a well at Badr and buried there, except Umayyah ibn Khalaf who was a fat man. When they tried to drag him, his flesh came off. They, therefore, buried him at the spot where he was.

The Prophet stayed in Badr for three days. When he achieved victory against an enemy, he normally stayed at the place three days.

On the third day, the Prophet ordered his she-camel to be ready and it was. Then he went on foot, followed by some of his companions who thought that he had something to do. He stopped at the well where the dead unbelievers were buried. He then called them one by one, mentioning everyone by his name and his father's name: "You Abu Jahl ibn Hisham, `Utbah ibn Rabi`ah, Shaybah ibn Rabi`ah, Umayyah ibn Khalaf; you so and so. Would it not have been better that you had obeyed God and His messenger? I have found that God's promise to me has come true. Have you found out that God's promise comes true?" The Prophet's companions wondered at his action. They said to him: "Messenger of God, how can they hear you or answer you? They have been there three days and they have begun to decompose. You are addressing bodies without souls." He said: "By Him who holds my soul in His hand, you cannot hear me better than they, but they can make no reply." "God has given them life back to hear his words as part of their rebuke, punishment and grief."⁴

* * *

1. I pray to God to bestow His peace and blessings on Prophet Muhammad, the noble Prophet who withstood so much for advocating God's message. What is related in this scene is just one episode of what he suffered. What is more hurting to a person absorbed in his address to God to realize that the unbelievers have sunk so low as to throw such filth on his back when he is offering his worship in God's house? What could hurt him more than to

⁴ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3976. The last sentence of explanation is by Qatadah.

hear the loud laughter of those chiefs of the Quraysh, the enemies of his message, as they ridiculed him and derided his message? In his situation when he was engaged in worship, he had to bear their laughter and ridicule.

Yet, how much more painful was that he could find none to support him on this occasion other than his young daughter? He was fully aware that every daughter admires her father and wishes to see him in the best form. She looks up to him as her support and her ultimate resort. So what were God's messenger's feelings when his daughter saw him in that situation and came to his support, removing the dirt off his back and hurling verbal abuse on his offenders and praying for God's support? How strongly did he feel her pain?

By God, if a person dies as a result of being in such a situation, his death would not be surprising, but God's messenger remained patient in this adversity, as he always did when encountering adversity.

We need to remember that all this aggression did not come to the Prophet as a surprise. Ever since the first moment when he undertook the task of delivering God's message, he was determined to bear with fortitude all that might be thrown in his way. No power could divert him from his task. He was as resolved as the prophets with the strongest resolve. May God bless His messenger, Muhammad ibn `Abdullah, and reward him most generously.

2. How could the chiefs of the Quraysh do something that was alien to their practices and traditions? They did not indulge in such repugnant actions. On the contrary, any of them might kill his opponent with his sword and then say that he killed a noble person. How could Abu Jahl lead them into such abomination so as to use filth as a weapon? It was contrary to their basic values. He had earlier led them into other abominations when they imposed an economic and social boycott on the Prophet's clan. For three years, the Hashimites were besieged in their quarters and left to suffer hunger and starvation. Yet the Arabs were proud of their generosity. Indeed hospitality and open-handedness were their national traits which they highly valued. When a poet praised a nobleman for his generosity, he would speak of his large dinner table and liberal gifts.

The only explanation is that their hostility to the Prophet was motivated by envy and grudge. This is the most bitter, dirty and unscrupulous type of hostility. It observes neither ethics nor values. Had their hostility been motivated by differences in outlook, or the desire to avenge some wrongs, it would have not sunk so low. It is the same type of hostility Satan harbours towards mankind. Another example of such hard hostility was the one felt by Pharaoh towards Moses. The Prophet described Abu Jahl as the Pharaoh oppressing the Muslim community.

3. `Utbah ibn Rabi`ah was the top chief of the Quraysh and was known for his wisdom and moderation. The same may be said for his brother Shaybah. Umayyah ibn Khalaf was the chief of the Jumah clan while `Umarah ibn al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah was the son of the chief of the Makhzum clan. How could such people ignore their reason and noble standing so as to indulge in such repugnance? When Abu Jahl first suggested it, they all shrank from it. How could they then be party to it? The hidden factor here is Abu Jahl's subtle way of leadership which enabled him to cunningly influence his superiors in status so that they would follow his lead. This was a personal quality which he always used for the wrong cause. His astuteness is clear in this case, as he managed to stop them from individually thinking about his proposal. He was thus able to move them to collective thinking which sidelined personal wisdom. He was shrewd enough not to offer to do it himself. Instead, he proposed it to them as a challenge for them all. He knew that `Utbah ibn Rabi`ah, his brother and son, Umayyah and `Umarah would never think of doing such a thing. The only one who would undertake such a stupid folly was `Uqbah ibn Abi Mu`ayt who was known for his recklessness and impertinence. Yet Abu Jahl did not propose it to him directly for fear that he would think that it degraded him. He proposed it to the group and the result was as Abu Jahl expected. `Uqbah volunteered to play that despicable part. When he did, they all joined in the ridiculous laughter. Thus, the proposer, the actor and the silent approver were party to this repulsive offence that was started with a word Abu Jahl said.

There are many wretched people like Abu Jahl who may be gang leaders or may assume the leadership of cultures or states. But they all end in ruin. Their followers absent-mindedly follow their

lead. Their reality check comes only when they face their catastrophic end which fills them with remorse. If their realization comes only in the life to come, it will be the most bitter, because they can no longer do anything about what they did in this life. The only thing they do is to say to those who led them astray: "Had we not followed you, we would have believed in God."

If we look carefully around us, how many people do we see covering their eyes and shutting their minds, following wretched people who are astutely leading them to ruin?

4. We realize that Prophet Muhammad was honoured by God Almighty. He answered his prayer fully. Their misery continued in the fact that they remained stubborn unbelievers until they met their deaths. He saw them all killed, and changing colour under the hot sun, in the battle which they thought would bring them victory against him. Then God overrode for him a natural law so that three days after their deaths they could hear him as he asked them whether they realized that God's warning had come true.

`Uqbah, the miserable miscreant who played the worst part in this horrible case received a more bitter end. He was not killed in the battle itself but was taken captive. Thus, he saw Prophet Muhammad whom he abused so abominably achieving a clear victory. He saw him as he ordered the burial of the dead, took the captives and distributed the booty. He saw him on his way back to Madinah in full victory. When the Prophet approached Madinah, he sentenced `Uqbah to death and the sentence was carried out. All this was ordained by God to redress the injury those people inflicted on him and to heal his heart of its pain.

God gave the Prophet something more. He was to see their children accepting his message, believing in him and following Islam, the faith their fathers fought him over. `Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl, Safwan ibn Umayyah, Hind bint `Utbah, Khalid ibn al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah, Umm Kulthum bint `Uqbah and al-Walid ibn `Uqbah all became Muslims and good servants of Islam.

5. The fact that `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud reported this story serves as a sign given by God and a miracle. He saw the event as it unfolded and felt the pain as he saw the harm and the ridicule suffered by the Prophet, but he was powerless to prevent it. When he reported it, he was in charge of the treasury at Kufah, appointed

by `Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph. He had witnessed how the great victory was achieved, with waves and waves of people coming forward to declare their belief in Islam. He saw how the Persian Empire was vanquished and how the Byzantine Empire was defeated. Their treasures were taken over and used to further the cause of God. God's will had come to pass and His religion triumphed while paganism was totally defeated. Wide indeed was the gulf between `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud's two days: the day he saw the event and the day he reported it.

6. We note that Ibn Mas`ud was fully aware of his responsibilities on both days. He was aware that he had no protection in Makkah, as he belonged to the Hudhayl tribe and was only an ally of the Quraysh in Makkah. That was a status that made him only a second-class citizen, or more of a foreigner in our present day terminology. He dearly wished that he had the power to lift the dirt off the Prophet's back. As he was powerless, he was required to remain patient. The scene was perhaps more painful to him than it would have been if the dirt was thrown on his own father's back. He would have loved that the dirt was thrown at his own eyes rather than on the Prophet's back. Nevertheless he did not take a foolhardy action to try to stop them. Had he done so, perhaps the consequences would have been much worse as those elders of the Quraysh would have become exceedingly angry. He would have exposed himself to grave danger and the danger could have engulfed other Muslims. In his situation, it was enough that he should be angry at what they were doing.

That he was right is confirmed by the fact that the Prophet approved what he did. He did not require him to do more than he did. Ibn Mas`ud was in the Prophet's company for a long time and he was never blamed for the position he took on this occasion. Hence, in the days when Islam was triumphant, he reported the event and confidently mentioned what he did, feeling clear that he was blameless. Should anyone have blamed him and remonstrated with him, he would have replied that the Prophet himself was aware of his attitude and found no fault with him.

If only we can understand the Prophet's guidance as Ibn Mas`ud had understood it, we would have preserved our resources

and used them wisely instead of wasting them in confrontations that could lead only to great loss.

7. `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud was a close companion of the Prophet since the very early days of Islam until he had passed away. That was a period of 23 years characterized by hard and determined oppression and persecution for 13 years in Makkah, including a three-year economic and social boycott of the Prophet, his followers and his clan. The chiefs of the Quraysh followed that by raising armies to fight him and exterminate his community after they had settled in Madinah. Yet Ibn Mas`ud says: "I never saw him praying against them except on that day." It is an inspiring statement as it shows the Prophet's unequalled qualities of forbearance and tolerance. How patient with them he was!

8. Why did the Prophet continue in his position of prostration, without lifting his head when the filth was thrown on his back? Why did he remain so until his daughter, Fatimah, came over and threw it away? What did he say during his prostration?

We do not know any of this precisely, but we know that by remaining in his position he deprived them of enjoying the scene they were awaiting. They wanted to see him rise in agitation, try to remove the filth but it spreads over his clothes and his body. That would have increased their laughter and ridicule. By staying in prostration, they were deprived of all that.

We are certain, however, that in his position, the Prophet addressed God and appealed to Him. Every moment during that period included a humble appeal to God, as if he was saying: My Lord, all this is for my efforts to carry out Your orders and deliver Your message. My Lord, I have called on them to believe and this is their reply. I have tried hard with them, but this is all they give me back. My Lord, all that I am suffering is for Your sake. Have I delivered my message? My Lord, be my witness.

9. Painful to the Prophet as this event was, it did not linger with him as a grievance. He did not re-live it time after time; nor did he mention it to remind others of it. He just took it in his stride and went on with his mission. This appears most clearly in his warm reception of the sons and daughters of those wretched people. He welcomed `Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl, Safwan ibn Umayyah ibn Khalaf, Hind bint `Utbah ibn Rabi'ah, Khalid ibn al-Walid the brother of

`Umarah ibn al-Walid, and even Umm Kulthum bint `Uqbah ibn Abi Mu`ayt. The amazing thing is not that the Prophet never reminded any of them of anything their fathers did against Islam. What is amazing is that he feared that some of his companions might say such a thing. He, therefore, insisted that they should not say anything of the sort. He told them: "Do not abuse those who are dead, because such abuse hurts their living relatives."⁵

10. The *hadith* also portrays a great scene in which we see Fatimah's courage at her young age. She was still a young woman when this happened and she came over, took the filth off her father's back and went up to those people, the noble chiefs of the Quraysh and hurled verbal abuse on them and on the perpetrator of that monstrosity. Very angry as she was, she did not cry, but stood firm in front of them and gave them what they deserved of abuse. God then gave her the pleasure of seeing her father ten years later performing the *tawaf* around the Ka`bah, a ritual of worship, together with one hundred thousand of his followers. The Ka`bah was free of pagan idolatry, with no idols to be seen there and no idolater offering worship there. Did she remember that earlier event when she saw her father doing his worship rituals? Did she wonder what happened to those people, or how they subsequently thought of their ridiculing laughter? What was their end?

God has perfected the grace He bestowed on her. Before he joined his Maker, her father told her: "Will you be happy to be the first lady in heaven?" May God bestow His peace and blessings on her and her father.

⁵ Related by al-Tirmidhi, *hadith* No. 1982 as reported by al-Mughirah ibn Shu`bah. It is also related by al-Bukhari on `A'ishah's authority, *hadith* No. 1393. She quotes the Prophet as saying: "Do not abuse those who are dead. They have to face what they had done in this life."

5. Preparing the King's Crown

The Prophet spent 13 years in Makkah advocating God's message, but those years were years of persecution of the Prophet and his followers. The Quraysh, the leading Arabian tribe, responded to his message with determined opposition, doing everything in its power to stifle it and put an end to Islam. When the situation in Makkah became too hard for the Prophet and his followers, God opened for him a breakthrough when a small number of the people of Madinah accepted Islam. Soon Islam spread in Madinah and many people there became Muslims. They invited the Prophet and the Muslims in Makkah to come over to their city. In Madinah, the Prophet established a pluralist city state whose population included several Jewish tribes and many pagan Arabs as well as the new Muslims from Madinah known as the Ansar and those who immigrated from Makkah known as the Muhajirin.

The scene we are looking at took place in the early months of the Prophet's immigration to Madinah. He looked after his companions and showed them much care. We see him riding a donkey, with Usamah ibn Zayd, behind him. He was heading to the quarters of al-Harith, a clan of the al-Khazraj, one of the two major Arab tribes of Madinah. He wanted to visit Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah, the al-Khazraj chief who was ill. On his way he passed by a group of people which included Muslims, Jews and pagan Arabs. In the group were 'Abdullah ibn Rawahah, a companion of the Prophet, and 'Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul, who had not yet declared himself a Muslim but was later to become the chief of the hypocrites who falsely claimed to be Muslims. The Prophet turned towards them, but as he approached them his donkey caused dust to rise, which was normal in Madinah where passages were unpaved. 'Abdullah ibn Ubay immediately put his hand over his nose and said: "Do not raise dust over us." He then said to the Prophet: "I find the smell of your donkey offensive." This was a rude reception. According to local tradition, Muslim and non-Muslim Arabs would rise to welcome a visitor, but Ibn Ubay showed the Prophet that he was unwelcome. The Prophet, however, overlooked this, greeted the people there and sat with them for a short while. He spoke to them

of his message and recited a passage of the Qur'an. Ibn Ubay listened and realized that he could not argue about the Qur'an. He felt that its argument was too powerful, but he wanted to make things difficult for the Prophet. He, therefore, said to him: "You, man! What you are saying is fine, if it be true. However, do not disturb us with it in our gatherings. Go back to your home and tell it to whoever comes to you."

Ibn Ubay was wicked, trying to raise doubt about the truth of what the Prophet said. Therefore, 'Abdullah ibn Rawahah was angry at his impertinence. He addressed the Prophet saying: "Do not take his word, messenger of God. Come to us in our places and admonish us with the Qur'an. We love that." One of the Muslims in the group said to Ibn Ubay: "By God, the Prophet's donkey smells better than you." There was some argument and the people there, Muslims, unbelievers and Jews were engaged in a slanging match that developed into physical fighting. The Prophet tried hard to calm them down and tell them that such behaviour was unbecoming. Eventually, they listened to him and cooled down.

The Prophet then mounted his camel and moved on. During his visit to Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah, he told him what had happened. He said: "Have you heard what Abu Hubab has said." [Abu Hubab was a respectful way of addressing or mentioning Ibn Ubay]. The Prophet wanted Sa'd to know because both he and Ibn Ubay were among the chiefs of the al-Khazraj tribe. Sa'd said: "Forgive him, messenger of God. By Him who has revealed the Qur'an to you, we learnt of the truth that has been revealed to you when the people of this city had agreed to make him king and to give him a sort of crown. By the time God has brought you to us, we were sawing the beads on the crown he was to wear. God has stopped us through the truth He has given to you. This made him feel aggrieved and this is the cause for what he has done." The Prophet pardoned him and overlooked the whole incident.

Not much later, the Battle of Badr took place, resulting in a great victory for the Muslims. Many of the chiefs of the Quraysh were killed in that battle. Ibn Ubay was hoping to make an alliance with those people in opposition to the Prophet. After the battle, however, he realized that he could no longer stand in open opposition to Islam. He said to his supporters of unbelievers: "This

cause is on the rise.” They went to the Prophet and pledged their loyalty to him as Muslims, but they harboured strong grudges against Islam and the Prophet.⁶

* * *

1. The first thing to note about this scene is that the Prophet passed by a mixed group of Muslims, pagan Arabs and Jews. Yet, he did not object to the Muslims being with this mixed group or socializing with unbelievers and Jews. Indeed, after what happened, the Prophet did not issue an order to the Muslims not to socialize with them. He left them in their group, making clear that social contacts are perfectly appropriate in human society. A Muslim who is in no doubt about his faith fears no ill effect of such socialization. He is indeed more likely to influence others than be influenced by them.

The ghetto mentality is alien to the Muslim community. It belongs to the unbelievers because they lack confidence and feel that their argument is flimsy. Hence, they advised one another: “Do not listen to this Qur'an, but drown it in frivolous talk, so that you may gain the upper hand.” (41: 26) `Abdullah ibn Ubay had a similar attitude, as he said to the Prophet: “Go back to your home and tell it to whoever comes to you.”

They feared to listen to the Qur'an and the Islamic message, and they feared the outcome of socializing with the Muslims. Therefore, they put themselves under a siege of isolation. The Prophet's companions, who were still newcomers to Islam, were more open and ready to mix with the others and live with them. They felt that through such contacts, their message would be better known and would make new inroads into the isolationism the unbelievers imposed on themselves.

⁶ See: al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, *hadith* No. 4566, 5663, 6207 & 6254; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1798. Also, al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 12, p. 157. Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 10, p. 592.

Yet today, some of us react to global openness by adopting a more inward looking attitude. They deal with their faith as if it were a glass panel that could easily break.

2. No one can fail to note the Prophet's high manners in all situations. Ibn Ubay addressed him impolitely, "You, man..." Yet when the Prophet reported to Sa'd what had happened, he referred to Ibn Ubay in the respectful form of Abu Hubab, which was traditional in Arabia, calling a man as the father of his eldest son. When the Muslims in the group were verbally quarrelling with the unbelievers about the Prophet, he did not engage in the quarrel. On the contrary, he tried hard to calm them down until they ultimately listened to him. It is his fine manners that ensured that the sort of agitation Ibn Ubay and others tried to stir came to nothing.

3. Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah's analysis of Ibn Ubay's reasons and situation was very accurate and based on clear insight. He was certain that the case was not one of opinions or ideas, or even the lack of a convincing argument. It was merely a case of envy. He felt that the truth advocated by God's messenger robbed him of a status he aspired to. It was almost his, but then the prophethood that belonged to someone else overtook the tribal leadership he hoped for. Hence, he took the wrong stand towards the Prophet and his message, and opposed it as hard as he could. When he felt that Islam was gaining grounds, he changed tactics and tried to undermine Islam from within. Thus the Muslims had to engage in a new type of fight against hypocrisy and the hypocrites.

The worst enmities the Prophet had to face were instigated by envy. This appears clearly when we analyse the attitudes of such opponents as Abu Jahl and the Jewish chief Huyay ibn Akhtab. As we have noted, the same feeling of envy was at the heart of Satan's enmity to mankind. God ordered him to prostrate himself before Adam, but he refused and said: "I am better than him." Such enmities are rarely extinguished. Those who harbour such enmities normally take them on right to the grave.

4. Ibn Ubay staged a series of schemes to undermine the Prophet and the Muslim community. In the second year of the Prophet's settlement in Madinah, he falsely professed to be a Muslim. In the third year, he did a very dirty trick at a critical time. When the Muslims mobilized to face the attacking forces of the

Quraysh, he deserted taking with him about one-third of the Muslim army, hoping to demoralize those who remained and giving encouragement to their enemies. In the fourth year, his hatred was expressed in an advice to his followers and a threatened the Muslim community. Both advice and threat are reported in the Qur'an. He told his followers: "Do not give anything to those who are with God's messenger, so that they may abandon him." (63: 7) And his threat was: "When we return to Madinah, the more honourable will surely drive out those who are contemptible." (63: 8) Then it was Ibn Ubay who started the falsehood that sought to raise doubt about the fidelity and integrity of 'A'ishah, the Prophet's wife. In the fifth year, he and his hypocrite supporters tried hard to demoralize the Muslims when they faced the determined onslaught of the forces allied against them. They said: "God and His messenger promised us nothing but delusions." (33: 12)

The Prophet took all these wicked attempts in his stride. His forbearance was such that he allowed none of them to develop into a bigger problem. He was keen to prevent their adverse effects and to nurture the good will of his companions. God, however, willed that Ibn Ubay would be more and more distressed, giving him some of his punishment in this life. He prolonged his life until he saw Islam triumphant, with people coming in flocks to embrace it. He saw one delegation after another from near and distant Arabian tribes arriving in Madinah to pledge their loyalty to the Prophet and accept Islam. He initially begrudged the Prophet being the master of the city of Madinah, but he lived to see the Prophet becoming the master of the whole of Arabia and held in awe by the Byzantine Emperor. When death approached, Ibn Ubay was most depressed.

5. The Prophet continued to overlook Ibn Ubay's wickedness and pardon him even after his death. When he died, his son 'Abdullah, who was a true Muslim, requested the Prophet to give him his shirt to cover with it his father's body in preparation for his burial. The Prophet gave him his shirt and said to him: "Let me know when you are ready so that I will come and offer prayers for him." This was a reference to the normal prayer offered for a deceased person before burial. Thus Ibn Ubay's body was wrapped in the Prophet's shirt. Then the Prophet came over before he was buried. When the Prophet stood up to start the prayer, 'Umar went up to him, held his robes and said: "Messenger of God, will you

offer this prayer for Ibn Ubay when he said this and that on different occasions?" `Umar mentioned several cases of what Ibn Ubay used to say, but the Prophet told him to stand back. Yet `Umar continued to appeal to him and said: "How can you offer this prayer for him when God has ordered you not to pray for such people's forgiveness, saying: 'You may pray for their forgiveness or may not pray for them, [for it will all be the same]. Even if you were to pray seventy times for their forgiveness, God will not forgive them.'" (9: 80) The Prophet said: "God has given me a choice to pray for their forgiveness or not to pray, and I will pray for him more than 70 times." The Prophet then offered the *janazah* prayer for him and made it long. Mujamma` ibn Jariyah, a companion of the Prophet, said: "I never saw God's messenger prolonging the prayer for a deceased person as he did when he prayed for `Abdullah ibn Ubay. He stood praying very long." When he finished, his body was carried and then lowered into his grave, but the Prophet ordered that he should be lifted. He placed his body on his knee, uncovered his face, and then put some of his own saliva in Ibn Ubay's mouth, so that the last thing he would have taken from this world would be the Prophet's saliva.

6. Anyone of `Abdullah ibn Ubay's words against the Prophet and the Muslim community would have been enough to sentence him to death. He would have also incurred the death penalty for scheming with the Prophet's enemies who were at war with him. To give but one example, he sent word to the Jewish tribe of al-Nadir when they were at war with the Prophet and besieged by him, saying: "If you are driven out, we shall most certainly go with you, and shall never pay heed to anyone against you; and if you are attacked, we shall most certainly come to your aid." (59: 11)

By all international standards, his attitude is classified as high treason. It is further compounded by statements like: "Do not give anything to those who are with God's messenger, so that they may abandon him." (63: 7) "When we return to Madinah, the more honourable will surely drive out those who are contemptible." (63: 8) In fact, his word 'contemptible' referred directly to the Prophet. Some of the Prophet's companions wanted to kill him there and then. One of these was `Umar ibn al-Khattab who said: "Messenger of God, allow me to strike off the head of this hypocrite." The

Prophet, however, overlooked the offence and told `Umar to leave him alone. The Prophet considered more important issues, such as:

- a. Had he been killed then, the news would have spread but the real reason would not have been equally known far and wide. This means that wrong explanations would be assumed that might deter people from accepting the message of Islam. Hence, the Prophet said to those who urged Ibn Ubay's killing: "No one shall say that Muhammad kills his companions." "It shall not be said that Muhammad fought with his companions and then killed them." "No one shall say that I fell upon my companions and executed them."
- b. The Prophet also considered the feelings of Ibn Ubay's friends among the Ansar. There were people who considered him a chief of their tribe. Confrontation with him might have angered some of these and displeased others, causing internal division among the Prophet's companions. The Prophet's forbearance with him made many among his own people take issue with him when he said something wrong. One day, the Prophet said to `Umar: "How do you feel now? Had I ordered his killing when you suggested that I should do, some people would have been very angry, while today these same people would kill him if I were to give an order." Thus the Prophet's attitude made those people angry with Ibn Ubay after they used to be angry on his behalf. They repeatedly took issue with him.

The Prophet's attitude consolidated two principles: 1) serving the community's interests and preventing harm, and 2) maintaining the friendly atmosphere within the Muslim community and preventing division.

6. The Master of the Valley

Sa`d ibn Mu`adh was the chief of the `Abd al-Ashhal clan, a branch of the major tribe of the Aws in Madinah. Umayyah ibn Khalaf was the chief of the Jumah clan of the Quraysh. They were friends and they frequently visited each other. When Umayyah went on a trade trip to Syria and passed by Madinah, he would be Sa`d's guest, and when Sa`d visited Makkah, he would be Umayyah's guest. Sa`d accepted Islam and believed in the Prophet. After the Prophet had settled in Madinah, Sa`d went to Makkah to perform the umrah, which is the mini-pilgrimage.

In Makkah Sa`d was his friend's guest. He said to him: "Abu Safwan, choose a quiet hour when I can perform the *tawaf*.⁷ Umayyah told him to wait until midday when few people would be around. It was a time when the people of Makkah stayed at home because of the heat. Umayyah took Sa`d to the Ka`bah around that time, thinking that they would not meet anyone. As Sa`d was performing his *tawaf*, Abu Jahl came over and asked: Who is this person doing the *tawaf* in full security. Sa`d was around 30 years of age and full of confidence. He immediately said: I am Sa`d ibn Mu`adh. Abu Jahl said: "I see that you are doing the *tawaf* here in Makkah in full security although you have given shelter to Muhammad and his companions, claiming that you will support and help them." Sa`d confirmed that. Abu Jahl said: "Were it not for the fact that you are with Abu Safwan, you would not go back safely to your people." Sa`d replied: "If you prevent me, I will do what will hurt you more, preventing your travel through Madinah." Umayyah said to Sa`d: "Do not raise your voice when you speak to Abu al-Hakam."⁸ He is the master of the people of this valley." Sa`d and Abu Jahl continued their verbal quarrel, while Umayyah held Sa`d and kept repeating his advice: "Do not raise your voice when you speak to Abu al-Hakam. He is the master of the people of this valley." Sa`d was angry with Umayyah who should have supported

⁷ *Tawaf* is the ritual of walking anticlockwise around the Ka`bah seven times, glorifying God. It is part of the duties of the pilgrimage and the umrah.

⁸ Abu Jahl's name was `Amr ibn Hisham, and he was respectfully addressed by his friends as Abu al-Hakam which loosely means 'father of wisdom', but the Muslims called him Abu Jahl which means 'father of ignorance'.

him as his guest and friend. He should not have allowed Abu Jahl to address him in this manner. Therefore, Sa'd pushed Umayyah in his chest and said: "Let me alone, Umayyah. I heard God's messenger saying that they will kill you." Surprised, Umayyah asked him: "Kill me?" Sa'd confirmed this. Again Umayyah asked him: "In Makkah?" Sa'd said he did not know. Umayyah was in real fear and said: "By God, Muhammad never tells a lie." When he returned home, he said to his wife: "Umm Safwan, my brother from Yathrib said to me something strange. He said that Muhammad told them that they will be killing me. I asked him whether this will be in Makkah and he did not know." She said: "Muhammad does not leave us alone. By God, he does not say a lie." Umayyah said: "I will never leave Makkah again."

In the second year of the Prophet's settlement in Madinah, he raised a lightly armed force of 313 men to intercept a trade caravan of the Quraysh as it was on its way back from Syria to Makkah. However, Abu Sufyan who was leading the caravan managed to evade the Muslim force, but only after alerting the Quraysh in Makkah. Abu Jahl raised the alarm and felt that the event offered an opportunity to mobilize the Quraysh forces to crush the Prophet and his companions. The Quraysh started full mobilization. Umayyah remembered what Sa'd told him and determined not to go out with the Quraysh army. Abu Jahl came over to him and tried to persuade him to join. He said: "Abu Safwan, you are the master of the people of this valley. When people see you staying behind, they will also stay behind. Why do you not march with us for a day or two?" As Abu Jahl increased his pressure on Umayyah, the latter said: "As you have left me no argument, I shall buy the best camel in Makkah." He intended to desert the army at the first sign of danger. Having a good camel would ensure that no one could chase him. He went home and told his wife to get things ready for him to join the Quraysh army. She said: "Abu Safwan, have you forgotten what your brother from Yathrib said to you?" He told her: "No, I have not forgotten. I only want to travel with them a short distance." He bought the camel and went with the Quraysh army. Whenever the army stopped for rest, he kept his camel by him. Yet he remained with the army until it reached the Badr Valley, where the battle took place. The Prophet and his companions inflicted a bitter defeat on the unbelievers. Most of the chiefs of Makkah were

killed. Abu Jahl was one of the earliest to be wounded. Umayyah saw with his own eyes how the Quraysh defeat was total and saw their chiefs being killed in battle. As the battle was about to end, Bilal ibn Rabah, who was formerly a slave belonging to Umayyah, saw him. Bilal was tortured very severely by Umayyah in an attempt to force him to renounce Islam. Bilal was only spared death when Abu Bakr bought him and set him free. When Bilal saw Umayyah at Badr, he appealed to a group of the Ansar to help him, shouting: "Here is Umayyah ibn Khalaf. May I not escape if he is allowed to escape." He and a couple of the Ansar men surrounded Umayyah and killed him.

Thus Umayyah ibn Khalaf met the end foretold by the Prophet. He was killed by the Ansar whom the Prophet said earlier that they would kill him. Umayyah met a painful death as he was killed after realizing that the Quraysh suffered a crushing defeat. Moreover, he saw Bilal, his former slave, taking part in killing him.

I can almost hear Sa'd saying after he saw this taking place: "This is what God and His Messenger have promised us! Truly spoke God and His Messenger." (33: 22)

* * *

1. The first thing to note about this story is the fact that the unbelievers were absolutely convinced that Prophet Muhammad always told the truth and never lied. Umayyah confirmed this on first hearing the news from Sa'd, and Umm Safwan, Umayyah's wife, said it also. Moreover, Umayyah's precautions and his wife's warnings confirm that they believed that what he said was sure to come true.

Indeed, the unbelievers were unanimous in believing that the Prophet never said what was false. This confirms that their disbelief in Islam was merely a manifestation of their stubborn rejection of God's message. It was just as God says of those unbelievers: "We know too well that what they say grieves you. Yet it is not you that they charge with falsehood; but it is God's revelations that the wrongdoers deny." (6: 33) This is indeed most strange. How can Umayyah believe that the Prophet tells the truth when he says that

his companions will kill him and does not believe him when he says that he is God's messenger? How come that they believe that the Prophet does not lie when he speaks to them about themselves and then they accuse him of lying when he attributes his revelations to God? This stark contradiction in their attitude confirms what the Qur'an says of them: "Within their souls they knew them [God's revelations] to be true, yet they, in their wickedness and arrogance, rejected them." (27: 14)

2. We note that Muslims maintained their relations with unbelievers. The Prophet's companions did not feel that their belief in Islam and their absolute rejection of idolatry required that they should sever friendship with unbelievers or that they should not exchange visits and hospitality with them. Hence, Sa'd and Umayyah continued to exchange visits after Sa'd embraced Islam and became a chief of the Ansar. Likewise, looking after each other's interests was totally acceptable. `Abd al-Rahman ibn `Awf, a leading companion of the Prophet, looked after Umayyah's interests in Madinah and Umayyah looked after `Abd al-Rahman's interests in Makkah. Each of them took care of the other's relatives and property.

Muslims are part of human society. They deal with other people and communities according to the highest ethical standards and the most noble feelings. They do not consider that their faith requires them to live in social isolation.

3. This story points out a clear sign of prophethood. The Prophet stated publicly to the Ansar that they would be killing Umayyah ibn Khalaf. They were in Madinah and he was in Makkah. No one could have imagined at the time how and when this would take place. Had Umayyah died naturally on his bed, it would have been recorded that the Prophet said something and it did not come true.

The Prophet never said anything untrue. When he mentioned a future event, he was full of certainty as he was informed of it by God. His companions also received the news with certainty because they believed in him. In less than a year after the Prophet gave them this information, Umayyah joined the Quraysh army, which only aimed to give a show of strength. Umayyah was killed by the swords of the Ansar. All his precautions, including the purchase of the best

camel in Makkah, availed him nothing. What the Prophet foretold came true.

4. We also note Abu Jahl's skilful persuasion and manipulation. He managed to get Umayyah to join the army despite his extreme reluctance. Abu Jahl played on Umayyah's feelings of self-importance and fuelled his conceit as he said to him: "Abu Safwan, you are the master of the people of this valley. When people see you staying behind, they will also stay behind." Abu Jahl thus gave him a feeling of leadership so as to assume that all the people followed his lead.

Abu Jahl then deluded Umayyah telling him to march with the army for a day or two. Abu Jahl was fully aware that Umayyah could not do that and then mount his camel and return home, leaving the army to go to the battlefield. To be killed by the Muslims' swords would be preferable to the humiliation associated with deserting the army. Once Umayyah joined the army he had to stay. He thus reached the point where he would meet his death. It was his friend Abu Jahl that skilfully led him there.

This shows that the leaders of unbelief may have great and superior talents and can influence others. However, they use their talents for the wrong cause, leading people astray. When they and those who follow their lead suffer the outcome of what they do, they will realize that it is of no use that they all share the same miserable fate.

5. We cannot fail to note the combination of wisdom and courage in Sa'd's character. He asked Umayyah to choose a quiet time for his performance of his worship. He realized that there was tension among the Quraysh in Makkah and, therefore, he sought no confrontation with anyone. However, when Abu Jahl said to him what he said, he showed no weakness. His answer was full of dignity, courage and confidence. He was wise in managing his purpose, but courageous in confronting his opponent. He dealt with every situation as suited it best.

6. We also note that the Prophet allowed a man who was around 30 years of age and who had been a Muslim for less than three years to travel from Madinah to Makkah, which was the base of idolatry and whose population were the most hostile to Islam. He did not fear that Sa'd would be influenced by what he would see

in Makkah. There was absolutely no worry that Sa`d might be weakened in faith. When we consider Sa`d's attitude in Makkah we realize that had the Prophet seen him, he would have been most pleased. He would have admired Sa`d's fortitude and wisdom.

This gives us a clear idea of how the characters of the Prophet's companions were psychologically cultivated so as to give them a very firm belief. This is clearly apparent in the confidence shown in them and their conviction. The Prophet took care of them, but his care in no way meant putting them under siege or keeping them all the time under watch.

7. Patience!

A Jewish community chose the city of Yathrib, which is the old name of Madinah, to settle in. As they travelled to reach it, they passed by Wadi al-Qura and several other places which were more fertile, beautiful and prosperous, but they did not choose to settle in any of them because they were trying to find the place to which the Prophet they intended to follow would be immigrating. They used to speak about a Prophet who would settle in a land which includes certain areas of volcanic rocks and palm date plantations. Therefore, they chose Yathrib as it met this description. They lived there awaiting the advent of this Prophet and the time when he would be immigrating to it. "They had repeatedly forecast its coming to the unbelievers." (2: 89) They used even to threaten the unbeliever Arabs that he would be forthcoming.

The Prophet heralded in the Scriptures was sent and he immigrated to their land as they had expected, but he did not belong to them. He was an Arab. This made them exceedingly envious and they rejected him: "Now that a Book confirming their own has come to them from God which they know to be the truth, they have denied it. God's curse be upon the unbelievers!" (2: 89)

When the Prophet arrived in Madinah, he dealt with the Jews in a matter that fitted his high ethical values. God describes him in the Qur'an: "Most certainly, you have a sublime character." (68: 4)

The Jews of Madinah continued to harbour grudges against Islam and the Prophet. Their behaviour and speeches betrayed what they concealed. On one occasion, a number of them came to the Prophet at his home. When they were in, they said: "*al-sam`alaykum*", twisting the traditional Islamic greeting of "*al-salam`alaykum*", which means "peace be to you". The word "*al-sam*" means "death". They sought to say the greeting in this way, hoping that it would not be noticed. The Prophet, however, understood what they said, and his reply was simple: "And to you." `A'ishah, in whose home this incident took place, also understood it. She was angry and said to them: "And to you be death and humiliation. May God curse you and remain angry with you." The Prophet turned to her and said: "Patience, `A'ishah. Do not be abusive and beware of

vulgarity and obscenity, as God Almighty does not love a person who is vulgar and obscene. Always be gentle, because God loves a gentle approach to all matters.” She said: “Messenger of God, have you not heard what they said? They said, ‘*al-sam`alaykum*.’” He said: “Have you not heard my reply. I merely said, ‘and to you’. My little prayer will be answered while theirs will not. ‘A’ishah, be mindful that gentility will adorn everything when it is used, and when it is removed from something, it leaves it faulty.’”⁹

* * *

1. The first thing to note about the Prophet’s dealing with the Jews is that it was guided by his sublime character. He continued to be kind to them and interact with them despite their successive schemes against him and the Muslim community. He treated them as well as he could, despite the fact that they unwittingly said at times what betrayed their ill-feelings. He tried hard to maintain good relations with them. He opened his door to them, let them into his blessed rooms and welcomed them, showing them untainted confidence. He wanted the friendliest relations to prevail between the communities living in Madinah. How else can we read their being welcomed in his home and his visits to them in their homes and schools? His attitude was based on his complete confidence in the truth of his message. Hence, he could deal even with his enemies on the basis of great ethical values.

2. We note also that the Prophet ordered ‘A’ishah not to use foul language, although she was only angry for his sake. Both of them heard the provocative phrase, but he did not want her to use such language so that she does not become used to it. Using vulgar language is unbecoming of believers. It is part of what God dislikes. Needless to say, a believer always steers away from what God dislikes. Foul language cannot be characteristic of believers. The Prophet’s attitude sought to educate ‘A’ishah although what the Jews said was foul indeed. He wanted ‘A’ishah to keep herself pure, free from any vulgarity. By maintaining good relations with the

⁹ See: Ahmad, *al-Musnad*, *hadith* No. 23171; al-Bukhari *hadith* No. 2935, 6024, 6256 & 6257; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2165, 2592 & 2594.

Jews, he hoped that they might be won over to the divine message. If they did not, then he would have made God's argument against them clear and irrefutable.

3. The incident shows how highly the Prophet valued the gentle approach to everything. He encouraged his wife to adopt it, telling her that it is a trait God loves to see in all His servants and that it adorns everything it touches, while its absence leaves things faulty. What is amazing is that he lays such emphasis on the gentle approach when dealing with the Jews who are described by God as the most hardened enemies of the Muslim community. They were the ones who went on the offensive in a way that showed their disrespect of the person they addressed. Were he to make an exception from the gentle approach, the exception should have applied to the Jews, particularly in that situation. But his character did not allow that. He ordered that the gentle approach should be maintained with them because he wanted it applicable in all situations.

Knowing that the Prophet always maintained the gentle approach in his dealings with others, even those who were most hostile, should we not question ourselves about it? How far do we maintain such an approach in our lives and in our relations with others? How far do we apply it with our brethren in faith? What will our society be like if the gentle approach adorns all its affairs and situations?

4. We also note that although the Prophet understood what those Jewish people said, he did nothing more than return it to them, saying: "and to you". He simply wished them what they wished him, without adding anything.

His was a perfectly fair answer. Had they said a good greeting when they entered, he would have replied in a much better way, but when they used an abusive word, he returned it to them. In fact, the situation did not lead to any further complications on his part, although he was the overall leader in Madinah and would have been able to take measures against them. He did not want that.

5. We also note that the Prophet ensured that public security was at its highest in Madinah. Everyone realized that they were under Muhammad's protection. The Jews went into his rooms, feeling safe and secure. Indeed, when they twisted their word of

greeting, they did not make it one that only they could understand. The Prophet's reply indicated his understanding as he simply said: "and to you". They, however, realized that they were safe under the Prophet's rule. They knew that he would never treat them unfairly or inflict on them a severe punishment.

6. Some people cannot appreciate kindness. They are too low to see the ethical summit. Their grudging souls cannot respond to easy interaction and faithful conduct. This was the case with those Jews of Madinah. The Prophet sought to put his relations with them on an easy footing and welcomed them in his home, but they could not suppress their grudge which surfaced at every turn. The Prophet, however, maintained his attitude, treating them well, guided by his sublime morality and implementing his superior principles. May God grant him, his wives and members of his household His peace and blessings.

8. The Young Lad

The lad was a Jewish boy in adolescent years, and he used to serve the Prophet, bringing him water for ablution, handing him his shoes and attending to some errands the Prophet wanted. He was absent for a few days and the Prophet missed him. Enquiring about him, the Prophet learnt that the lad was ill, so he went to visit him. He sat close to his bed and looked at him carefully. He was full of compassion to him as he realized that he was departing this life and looking to the future one when he will meet his Lord. Hence the Prophet said to him what he needed most at that point, urging him to become a Muslim, saying: “Embrace Islam and say: ‘I bear witness that there is no deity other than God and that Muhammad is God’s messenger.’”

The young lad was fully aware of what the Prophet was like as he served him and accompanied him in different situations. He realized that the Prophet was truthful. Yet he was a young adolescent, tied to his family. As he listened to the Prophet whom he loved, he looked around and fixed his eyes on his father as if asking for his reaction. The Prophet repeated what he said, clearly hoping that the lad would say the declaration that brought him into Islam before death caught up with him. The father looked at his dying son and said: “Obey Abu al-Qasim.¹⁰ Say what Muhammad is saying.” The lad said the words, completing the declaration that made him a Muslim: “I bear witness that there is no deity other than God and that you are God’s messenger.” A few minutes later, the lad passed away.

When the Prophet left the house, his sorrow for the loss of the young lad was mixed with his pleasure that he finished his life as a Muslim. He said: “All praise be to God that He saved him from the Fire through me.” He then turned to his companions and said to them: “Offer the *janaazah* prayer for your brother.”¹¹

¹⁰ Abu al-Qasim was the Prophet’s name when he was called as the father of his eldest son, as the traditional address of respect. The Prophet had two sons by his first wife and one by Maria, the Copt. All three died in infancy.

¹¹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 1356; Ahmad, *hadith* No. 13330; Abu Dawud. *Hadith* No. 3059.

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1. The first point to reflect upon in this story is the social interaction between the Prophet and the Jews. One of their lads finds his way into his home to serve him personally, giving him water for his ablutions and handing him his shoes. There is no doubt that the Prophet's companions would have loved that their own children could have had such a favour, because they would have looked upon it as an honour to serve God's messenger. Yet there was room for a Jewish lad to have that honour.

2. We note the cordial atmosphere in dealing with unbelievers, whether idolaters or Jews. We feel that there was no tension or apprehension in these relations. As we have previously noted, the Prophet passed by a group of people that included Muslims, Jews and idolaters and he sat with them, spoke to them about Islam and bid them good-bye. He also visited the Jews in their homes and accepted their invitations,¹² and welcomed them when they visited him at home. He went further than this, giving a Jewish lad the favour of being his personal servant.

This reflects strength and confidence. Such interaction is the shortest way to make Islam and Muslims known to these people and remove the barriers that they might have had towards the Islamic message. The young lad who was called upon by the Prophet to accept Islam was not unaware of what Islam was and what it meant for him to be a Muslim. His close contacts with the Prophet assured him of the Prophet's truthfulness. When his father showed no objection, he immediately responded even though he was at a critical moment of his life. He would not have done so without being well aware of Islam.

3. There is a clear human dimension in the Prophet's dealings with non-Muslims. Prophet Muhammad was sent as a manifestation of God's grace towards all the worlds. Hence, he dealt compassionately with non-Muslims. Captives of war were well treated and given good food, and those who were sick were visited by the Prophet. When a Jewish funeral passed by the Prophet, he rose to show respect. Some of his companions said that the

¹² See, al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2617; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2190.

deceased was a Jew. He said: “Is he not a human being?”¹³ In this story, we are speaking about the Prophet visiting a young Jewish lad who was ill. He was neither a tribal chief nor a leader, but he was merely a young servant. Here is human greatness and nobility at its best. The Prophet thus gave the lead which his companions and followers followed. They were thus able to open people’s hearts to Islam and to give them its light.

4. We may wonder at the Prophet’s exceeding pleasure and his obviously delighted face as he praised and thanked God that the lad was saved from the fire through him. He then established the bond of brotherhood between the deceased lad and his own companions, ordering them to hold the prayer for the deceased for the departed lad. We may ask what benefit was there for the Prophet and his companions when a young lad accepted Islam and died within the next hour. He took part in no battle and made no material contribution to the Muslim community. Why is this delight? The Prophet’s cause for which he devoted his time, energy and life was to provide guidance to people so that they could save themselves from hell. All his feelings were linked to this cause: his pleasure, sorrow and anger were all focused on providing such guidance. Hence, he is most pleased with one person accepting this guidance and believing in God’s message. That it was a young lad who died within the next hour made no difference to his feelings. It was a life saved from hell. The Prophet who is so delighted with this conclusion used to be heartily grieved when people turned away from his message. God describes his feelings in the following terms: “Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they will not believe in this message?” (18: 6)

People who are most effective in the advocacy of a cause are those whose cause takes roots in the depth of their feelings. They interact with it heart and soul. Thus was Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

5. Finally, we note that the Prophet was totally devoted to his message at all times. He let no opportunity pass without trying to bring guidance to people, even when a person is on his death bed.

¹³ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 1312; Muslim, *hadith* No. 961.

When we look at the Prophet during his visit to this ill young lad, we see him full of humility, compassion and friendship. His was a most sublime character. Hence God commands us: “God and His angels bless the Prophet. Believers! Bless him and give him greetings of peace.” (33: 56)

9. The Noble Idolater

The Battle of Badr, which was the first major battle in the history of Islam, was started and finished with two significant ethical lessons. Prophet Muhammad mentioned on one occasion that his mission was “to bring high morality to perfection”. Here he was endeavouring to do just that in the exceptional circumstances of war.

The first of these lessons was given before the start of the battle. The Muslim soldiers were full of bitterness because they suffered injustice at the hands of the Quraysh over a period of 13 years. Now the Quraysh has raised an army to crush them. Yet at this very moment, the Prophet declared protection for a man who was an idolater coming with the Quraysh army, carrying his sword and willing to fight the Muslims. Nevertheless, the Prophet said: “Whoever encounters Abu al-Bakhtari ibn Hisham must not kill him.”

In giving this announcement, the Prophet highlighted the fact that the man had taken an ethical stand distinguishing him from the rest of the idolaters as a man of integrity and nobility. During the Prophet’s life in Makkah, he was the last to cause harm to the Prophet or the Muslims. Moreover, when the Quraysh imposed its economic and social boycott of the Muslims and the Prophet’s clan, he took a positive stand to ensure that the boycott was ended. The Prophet appreciated his effort. He announced that Abu al-Bakhtari must not be killed, even though he was an idolater who came with the army to fight the Muslims.

The second ethical lesson was given after the battle which ended in a glorious victory for the Muslims that included taking 70 captives. Two of these, al-Nadr ibn al-Harith and `Uqbah ibn Abi Mu`ayt, were among the most hostile to the Prophet and caused him the worst harm. The memories of all the Quraysh injustice and persecution were still fresh in the minds of most Muslims. The unbelievers were particularly vile in their treatment of the vulnerable elements among the Muslims. They directed much abuse towards the Prophet himself. Hence, the hearts of many Muslims were still very bitter. If they were now eager to take revenge on

those idolaters, they would only give vent to natural feelings. Yet at this very moment, the Prophet looked at those prisoners of war and said: "Had al-Mut'im ibn `Adiy been still alive and spoken to me about these stinking people, I would have let them free for his sake." This was a declaration by the Prophet that all those prisoners of war would have been released and set free if only al-Mut'im would have made a simple request, saying: "Muhammad, let them free for my sake." This despite all their criminal record. He would have suppressed all feelings of avenging past injustice to grant a request by al-Mut'im.

Yet we need to remember that this man, al-Mut'im ibn `Adiy, lived and died as an idolater. He never said a simple prayer such as : "My Lord, forgive me my sins on the Day of Judgement." However, he was a man of great integrity. This was manifested when the Prophet returned to Makkah after his unsuccessful trip to Ta'if. He needed to enter his hometown under someone's protection, and al-Mut'im extended to him this protection. The Quraysh honoured his pledge as they considered him one of their best people.

Al-Mut'im was also a wise person. After the Prophet and his companions immigrated to Madinah, he addressed the Quraysh in Makkah and said: "You have done to Muhammad whatever you did. Now you should leave him alone." Al-Mut'im was an idolater, but he was noble. The Prophet declared his appreciation of his nobility on that great day.

* * *

The Battle of Badr was full of moral lessons, including the following:

1. Appreciating the integrity and favours of people, even though they may be unbelievers serving in a hostile army. The fact that they are guilty of the worst sin, which is the association of partners with God, should not stop us from acknowledging their integrity and fine morality.

2. Returning favours. The Prophet never overlooked favours done to him or to his companions. This reflects his high moral

values. He remembered these even at the most critical times of military confrontation when a leader is preoccupied with the immediate situation: a time normally characterized by high tension and bitter feelings.

Those people of integrity took an ethical stand towards the person whose mission was defined as “bringing high morality to perfection”, and who used to say: “Returning favours is an aspect of faith.”¹⁴ Prophet Muhammad, the noblest of all people appreciated the attitudes of those noble people, highlighted them and returned them as they could have been best returned.

3. The Prophet mentioned the favours of those unbelievers at a time when such deeds are not normally remembered, because it was the time of battle when everyone with a grudge wants to take revenge. The Prophet, however, disregarded such feelings as unworthy, making clear that he would always take an ethical stand. His attitude was not a political gesture. It reflected principled leadership.

4. When the Prophet mentioned those noble idolaters, he was not speaking to their families or relatives. He was addressing his companions to cultivate their ethical sense. He wanted them to appreciate an ethical trait even though it belonged to an idolater. He sought to impress on them that such traits were worthy of them as Muslims, so that they would always appreciate ethical values and return favours. Moreover, the Prophet wanted them to always be fair, giving other people their dues.

5. The Prophet’s companions understood the Prophet’s purpose and were always keen to be fair to others. They acknowledged the good traits of people of other religions, cultures and races. Hassan ibn Thabit, the Prophet’s poet, wrote an eulogy of al-Mut’im ibn `Adiy. He highlighted his good deeds and praised his moral values. `Amr ibn al-`As spoke of the Byzantines and highlighted five moral values to which they adhered and which were the cause of their rise.

6. Although the Prophet was keen to instil this concept in the Muslim community in all generations, we often ignore it. Although

¹⁴ Related by al-Tabarani in *Al-Mu`jam al-Kabir*, vol. 23, p. 14; al-Hakim in *Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 1, p. 62 and al-Bayhaqi in *Shu`ab al-Iman*, *hadith* No. 9122 & 9123.

many in our midst express their admiration of the West in superlative terms, some of us avoid any acknowledgement of the good moral values and refined manners of Western people. Yet it is these that give a solid foundation to Western civilization. Indeed, we may evaluate people on the basis of a single bad deed they might have committed, or a slip they might have made. Some of us may find it hard to acknowledge the good points of a person who adopts a different point of view, or arrives at a different conclusion in a case that admits such differences. The Prophet applied the highest standards of fairness with people who believed in a diametrically opposite religion, namely, idolatry. We should follow his lead and apply these standards, particularly with our Muslim brethren. We should remember that we have much that should bring us together and little to separate us. Hence, if they are wrong, we must not make their error a mental prison cell in which we place them, and overlook whatever good qualities they may have.

10 Are You an Admiration Seeker?

His dark eyes told you that this handsome, tall young man with bright teeth was very intelligent. Although he was in his twenties, he inspired respect. Moreover, he was close to the Prophet who said to him once: “Mu`adh, by God, I love you for God’s sake.” The young man replied: “And by God, I love you too for God’s sake, messenger of God.”¹⁵

The Prophet indicated his status by saying: “Mu`adh will be ahead of the scholars on the Day of Judgement.”¹⁶ He also said: “The one in my community who knows best what is permissible and what is forbidden is Mu`adh.”¹⁷ He was one of four people who learnt the Qur'an by heart during the Prophet’s lifetime.¹⁸

Mu`adh achieved this status through being very close to the Prophet. He would come from the quarters of his clan, the Salamah, and offer his prayers with the Prophet and attend him. When the Prophet offered the Isha prayer, the last of the day, Mu`adh would join him and go back to his people where they would be waiting for him. He would lead their congregational prayer of Isha. It would count as voluntary for him and obligatory for them. They waited for him because they appreciated his status as the most learned and the best reciter of the Qur'an among them.

This young scholar was involved in a situation that was of great significance. One day, Mu`adh prayed Isha with the Prophet and went home where his people were waiting for him as usual. He led them in prayer and started reciting the second surah, *The Cow*, which is the longest in the Qur'an. He was reading at ease, and he gave the impression that he wanted to read it in full, rather than reading a passage of it.

In the congregation was a young man who spent his day watering his farm, bringing water from a spring at a distance, and

¹⁵ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 22119; Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 1522; Ibn Hibban, *hadith* No. 2020 & 2021 and al-Hakim, vol. 1, p. 273.

¹⁶ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 108; al-Hakim, vol. 3, p. 268.

¹⁷ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 12904; al-Tirmidhi, *hadith* No. 3791; Ibn Majah, *hadith* No. 154; Ibn Hibban, *hadith* No. 713; al-Hakim, vol. 3, p. 422.

¹⁸ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3810; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2465.

using his camel for the purpose. By the end of the day, he was very tired. As Mu`adh continued his easy recitation of this long surah, the tired young man felt unable to continue, and he left the congregation to finish his prayer alone, reading a short passage. He then left the mosque and rode his camel. When Mu`adh finished the prayer, he was told of what happened. He said: "The man is a hypocrite." The young man was informed of what Mu`adh said. Therefore, he went the following day to the Prophet and said to him in Mu`adh's presence: "Messenger of God, we have to work for our living and we use our camels to fetch water for irrigation. Mu`adh stays long with you and comes back to us and takes long in prayer. Yesterday he led our prayer and read *The Cow*. I shortened my prayer and he accused me of being a hypocrite.

The Prophet turned to Mu`adh and said to him: "Mu`adh, are you an admiration seeker? Do you want to be admired? Do you want to turn people away? When you lead the prayer, read a surah like *The Sun*, *The Most High*, or *The Night*.¹⁹ In your congregation there will be someone who is elderly, or weak or having an urgent business."

The Prophet then spoke to the young Ansari man and said: "Nephew, what do you do when you pray?" He said: "I read the first surah, *The Opening*, and then sit for my *tashabbud*, and at the end I say in my supplication: 'My Lord, I appeal to You to admit me into heaven and to give me shelter from the Fire.' By God, I do not know what you and Mu`adh read." The Prophet said to him: "I and Mu`adh say what is similar to what you say." The young man said: "Mu`adh, however, will know the truth when the Quraysh come." The Muslims were aware that the Quraysh had mobilized an army to attack Madinah in the Battle of Uhud.

When the battle took place, the young man took part and was killed. The Prophet later asked Mu`adh: "What happened to my and your disputant?" Mu`adh said: "Messenger of God, he told the truth while I said what was untrue. He was a martyr."²⁰

¹⁹ These are surahs 91, 87 and 92 respectively. Each is around eight lines, while surah 2 is 49 pages comprising 735 lines.

²⁰ See: Ahmad, *hadith* No. 12247, 14307 & 20699; al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 701, 705 & 6106; Muslim, *hadith* No. 645.

* * *

1. The first thing to note about this scene is the separation between the importance of an act of worship and the way it is offered. Prayer is the most important fundamental of Islam after the declaration of belief in God's oneness and Prophet Muhammad's message. Prayer is the mainstay of Islam and the act that gives believers most happiness. However, to offer prayers in a way that is hard for the worshippers is wrong. It causes the Prophet to be angry and to remonstrate with the one who does it.

This clear distinction between the religious status of an Islamic duty and the way people endeavour to implement it is very clear in the Prophet's attitude. He never showed as much anger when he was giving an admonition like he did when he spoke against someone who led the Fajr prayer and made it very long. He said: "People, be careful. Some of you put people off. Whoever leads a prayer should make it short." Yet he was fully aware of the importance of reciting the Qur'an in the early hours of the morning, as indicated in the verse that says: "Keep up prayer when the sun is on its decline, in the darkness of the night, and recite the Qur'an at dawn, for the recitation of the Qur'an at dawn is indeed witnessed." (17: 78)

Examples abound. The Prophet rebuked Usamah ibn Zayd very severely for killing a man after he declared his belief that there is no deity other than God and that Muhammad is God's messenger. He only killed him in battle when Usamah was a soldier fighting unbelievers according to the Prophet's orders.²¹

Likewise, the Prophet was very angry when a man brought all his money to donate it to charity. The Prophet threw it at him in anger and said: "A man may bring all his money to give away, then he would beg. True charity [*sadaqah*] is that given of what is in excess of one's needs."²² Yet it was the Prophet who said on another occasion: "Charity is a real proof."²³

²¹ This will be discussed in detail in chapter 21.

²² Related by Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 673; Abu Ya'la, *hadith* No. 2084; Ibn Khuzaymah, *hadith* No. 2441.

²³ Related by Muslim, *hadith* No. 223.

This clear distinction between the importance of a certain act of worship and the way it is conducted or implemented opens the way to criticize an action and to correct errors.

Subsequently people confused the two. A person may put people to hardship by his wrong conduct of prayer, which is the main pillar of Islam. Similarly, a person may lead people to their death by his wrong pursuit of jihad, which is a major duty of Islam. Another may cause harm to people by his wrong way of forbidding what is evil, although this is the quality that is meant to save the Muslim community from ruin. Likewise, someone may make things too difficult by his wrong approach to urging people to do what is good, although admonition is meant to encourage people to attend to what Islam urges and encourages.

It is only to be expected that people may make mistakes in attending to worship rituals. No one expects people to be like prophets or angels. However, to divert criticism from themselves, some people cite texts that speak about religious duties to enforce their importance. A person who leads a prayer and makes it very long will defend himself, citing the verse that says of prayers: "It is indeed a demanding task except for the devout." (2: 45) Thus, he tries to justify himself by saying that prayer is meant to be demanding. When some of us resort to wrong action that they claim to be undertaken as jihad, they try to divert criticism, citing the verse that says: "Fighting is ordained for you, even though it is hateful to you." (2: 216) Thus they take only a portion of the verse to justify their action, but in so doing they twist the message the verse imparts. Some people follow a wrong way in trying to prevent what Islam considers wrong, but when they are told that their method was wrong they refer to a *hadith* in which the Prophet gives the example of a group of people in a boat. Those in the lower part thought of making a hole in their section so as not to disturb the others at the top by going to the top to draw water from the sea. The *hadith* encourages those on the top to stop those trying to make a hole so that the boat would not go down. Alternatively, they cite the *hadith* that makes clear that a person who is not unhappy with the commitment of sin is devoid of faith. Thus, they cite these *hadiths* out of context in order to justify their wrong method. In all these cases, texts that are intended to highlight the importance of

certain actions are cited as a proof endorsing the wrong approach to it.

The Prophet showed us the right approach. When he was told of a mistaken conduct by the one leading the prayer, he said to him: “Are you an admiration seeker, Mu`adh?” On the other occasion he said: “Some of you put people off their worship.” On the wrong approach in jihad, he said to Usamah: “Have you killed him after he has said ‘I bear witness that there is no deity other than God?’” He also said about Khalid’s action: “My Lord, I disclaim what Khalid has done.”²⁴

The Prophet looked at the actions and set them right, and he pointed out mistakes and showed the way to rectify them.

2. `Ubaydillah ibn `Adiy reports: “I heard `Umar giving a speech in which he said: ‘People, do not make people hate God.’ He was asked: ‘How could that be?’ He said: ‘A person leads a congregation in prayer and makes it so long that people begin to hate what they are doing.’” Today we say: May God bestow His mercy on `Umar; because we made many people hate several types of worship. May God forgive us.

²⁴ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 4339.

11. From Uhud to Yarmuk

No fiction writer could have written a more amazing story, but reality is often stranger than fiction. It begins by the mountainside of Uhud, close to Madinah, in the third year of the Prophet's immigration to Madinah. There the army of the unbelievers was getting ready to fight the Prophet and the Muslims. The overall commander of the unbelievers' army was Abu Sufyan ibn Harb and he mobilized his army according to the highest level of shrewd leadership, politically, militarily and psychologically. He, therefore, chose for divisional commanders a number of young men who combined fighting skills with hardened enmity to the Prophet. They were the sons and relatives of the leaders of the first confrontation and hostilities with the Prophet. As such, they were hardened opponents who followed their parents' footsteps and carried the enmity further. Abu Sufyan assigned the command of the right flank to Khalid ibn al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah while the left flank was given to `Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl. The three were nursing new grudges and eager to take revenge. Abu Sufyan lost his son Hanzalah in the Battle of Badr which took place a year earlier. `Ikrimah's father, who was Khalid's cousin, was also killed in that battle.

The two armies engaged in battle and the Muslims were able to quickly gain superiority. However, Khalid was a shrewd commander. He was able to make a surprise turn so as to attack the Muslim army from behind. Victory changed hand and the unbelievers were able to prevail, killing 70 of the Prophet's companions. The unbelievers even disfigured some of their victims, including Hamzah ibn `Abd al-Muttalib, the Prophet's uncle who was the dearest person to him. The unbelievers were able to injure the Prophet, breaking his helmet and front teeth. They wounded him in the face and his lower lip, two rings of body armour pierced his cheek, and blood ran over his blessed face.

Abu Sufyan hastened to confirm his snatched victory and declare his side the victors. He sought to add insult to injury crying out: "Sublime is Hubal [the unbelievers' main idol]. This is a victory to offset what happened in Badr, so that war is drawn. He then

proceeded to withdraw from the battlefield in order to preserve this quick victory.

The Prophet began to wipe the blood off his face. He said: "How can those people hope to be successful when they have injured their Prophet and broken his teeth, causing him to bleed when he is only calling on them to believe in God? God is very angry with people who have wounded His messenger in the face." He then remained silent for a while before he said: "My Lord, forgive my people as they do not know what they are doing." Then God revealed to him verses that answered his question: "You have no say in the matter. [It is for Him] to accept their repentance or punish them. They are wrongdoers." (3: 128)

Ten years passed which witnessed a great victory for Islam, and people embraced it in large groups. The Prophet passed away. Now we are at the other end of the story, at the place close to Yarmuk in Syria, in year 13 AH (635 CE). The Muslim army is preparing to meet the Byzantine armies in a decisive battle that would determine the end of the Byzantine presence in the Syrian areas.

Who were the commanders of the Muslim army in this decisive battle? Well, the supreme commander was none other than Khalid ibn al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah. A division of the army called itself the 'Death Division' because everyone in it pledged that they would either achieve victory or die. Its commander was none other than 'Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl ibn Hisham. The responsibility of maintaining the morale of the army was assigned to Abu Sufyan ibn Harb.

These were the same commanders of the unbelievers' army in the Battle of Uhud. Is it amazing? What was their commitment like? 'Ikrimah was calling out: who will pledge himself to die? Four hundred brave fighters rallied around him and everyone of them was most eager to be a martyr. By the end of this most decisive battle, 'Ikrimah was among the Muslim martyrs. Abu Sufyan was in the division commanded by his son, Yazid. He was eighty years of age and had lost one eye when he was in the Prophet's army in the siege of Taif. Now he was overlooking the army with his one eye and calling out, encouraging the Muslim fighters to fight hard and remain steadfast. He used to say as loudly as he could: "You are the fighters for Islam and the guards of the Arab land, while your

enemy fights for idolatry and defends Byzantium. This is one of Your days, my Lord. Grant us victory. Victory is granted by God, and it is near.” We may imagine the effect of his words on the Muslim fighters as they saw this most senior chief of the Quraysh shouldering the burden of his eighty years and encouraging them to fight hard. The battle resulted in a clear and decisive victory for the Muslims. Much of the credit for that victory belonged to the supreme commander, Khalid ibn al-Walid.²⁵

* * *

1. The contrasting scenes of Uhud and Yarmuk portray the great gulf Abu Sufyan, Khalid and `Ikrimah crossed. In the first, they were commanding an army which had the clear aims of fighting and killing God’s messenger, and putting a final end to his message. You only need to close your eyes and open them again to see all three fighting hard to defend that very message. They led the Muslim marchers who wanted only to make his message known to people. In order to do that, they had to fight hard in that battle that was a major turning point for the message of Islam. In that battle, `Ikrimah was killed, Abu Sufyan was hit in his other eye and Khalid achieved a great victory.

The Prophet had passed away three years earlier. There was no need for anyone to curry favour with him. Their attitude manifested profound adherence to his message and a total trust in what he had promised. They turned their backs on their old, inherited hostility and their burning desire for revenge, although they were Arabs who attached great importance to revenge and tribal heritage and kept their enmity alive. Those commanders who fought the Prophet earlier experienced a great change that made them the commanders fighting for his cause, after his death. That transformation was the result of faith that reshaped their thinking, remoulded their mentality, overhauled their values, redefined their aims and gave them a clear vision of the message and its goals.

²⁵ See; Muslim, *Sahih, hadith* No. 1791; al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, p. 65 & 335. Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah*, vol. 9, pp. 545-569.

Such was the success of Muhammad's advocacy of the divine message. He gave a new life to souls that were almost lifeless.

2. In the Battle of Uhud, the Prophet was physically and mentally hurt. As he wiped the blood off his face, he wondered: "How can these people hope to be successful when they have injured their Prophet?" His words reflected his refined character and sublime manners. He merely posed a question. He did not seal their fate. Nor did he claim that God would never be merciful to them. He did not pray to God to punish them most severely. He only wondered whether they would ever be successful after having committed such atrocities: they killed some of the best people in the Muslim camp, disfigured them, attacked God's messenger and wounded him. How could they be successful when they had done this to the Prophet who called on them to believe in God? When a person keenly feels pain, both physical and mental, he does not only pose a question. Prophet Muhammad was the person who knew God best and feared Him most. Therefore, he maintained his polite attitude and restricted the expression of his feelings to a mere question, attempting to make no final word.

3. The Prophet merely asked a question suggesting a distant possibility: "How can those people hope to be successful when they have injured their Prophet". By human standards, the idea would be given as a foregone conclusion with everyone saying that the people who so injured the Prophet would never be successful. How could this come about when they have gone to the furthest limit in their enmity to him, trying to exterminate him and his followers? However, divine revelations were given putting the destiny of all people outside the jurisdiction of the Prophet, even though he was the dearest person to God and the most noble in character and manners. "You have no say in the matter." (3: 128) The question of eventual success and everlasting happiness is determined by God: "Say: all power of decision rests with God." (3: 154) It is all ultimately decided by God according to His knowledge and His will: "[It is for Him] to accept their repentance or punish them. They are wrongdoers." (3: 128) We might imagine that the Prophet's companions endowed with insight realized that this verse gave a hint that those unbelievers would ultimately see the light of God's guidance and repent. He states the possibility of accepting their repentance first, ahead of His punishment. They might have

wondered how and when this would take place when those unbelievers showed no sign of being less hostile to Islam. Yet God knows best and He brings about His will in ways human beings may not perceive: “My Lord is gracious in whatever way He wishes. He is all-knowing, truly wise.” (12: 100)

4. Despite the acute physical and mental pain the Prophet felt as he considered what happened to his companions, and the large number of them who were killed and disfigured, and the injuries he himself suffered, and despite the vindictive and ridiculing language the unbelievers were saying, he prayed for God’s mercy and forgiveness. He said: “My Lord, forgive my people as they do not know what they are doing.” When we contemplate the situation when this prayer was said we fully appreciate the significance of his description in the Qur’an: “Most certainly, yours is a sublime character.” (68: 4) He did not pray to God to give him victory over them. He did not merely pardon them and move on to pray for them. He went even further than that, citing their ignorance of his status as an excuse, even though it is not a valid excuse. This is nobility of character at its best, a summit that no one can reach.

5. Prophet Muhammad is granted the highest position with God Almighty. He undertook the most honourable mission, advocating God’s message and calling on his people to believe. Yet when he suffered these injuries, he neither did nor said anything more than to ask: “How can those people hope to be successful when they have injured their Prophet”? He neither determined their fate nor said anything that God might grant. This is a perfect example of his humility and self-effacement. Many are the people who are keen to stress their own importance and feel that they deserve to be honoured. They even consider that they have a high position with God that He would immediately avenge them against anyone who says or does something they dislike.

6. Another lesson we may take from this story is that we must never despair of anyone recognizing the truth of the message of Islam. Anyone who saw what these three commanders were doing on the day of the Battle of Uhud could have never imagined what they would be like later, even though he might be the most optimistic of people. It is not right that we should look at people as they seem to us at present and imagine that they will never change.

We should remember the Qur'anic verse that says: "It may well be that God will bring about affection between you and those who are now your enemies. God is all powerful; God is much forgiving, ever merciful." (60: 7) We should also look on the bright side to remain always optimistic. This will give us more serenity so as to maintain the gentle approach in our advocacy of the divine message.

12. Widely Different Responses

Abu Bara' `Amir ibn Malik was the chief of the `Amir tribe and known by the nickname Mula`ib al-Asinnah, which indicated that he was very dextrous with spears. He came to Madinah and the Prophet explained Islam to him and called on him to accept it. He neither embraced Islam nor took a hostile attitude.

However, he suggested that the Prophet should send a number of his companions to Najd in central Arabia and added: "I hope that the people of Najd will give you a favourable response." The Prophet said: "I fear that the people of Najd might be hostile to them." He said: "I will extend protection to him."

The Prophet sent seventy of his best companions, known as 'the reciters'. These were people who worked during the day, collecting firewood and selling it. They used the money to buy food for the needy people. At night they revised what they memorized of the Qur'an before starting their voluntary night prayers. The Prophet appointed al-Mundhir ibn `Amr al-Sa`idi as their leader. Among them were `Urwah ibn Asma', Haram ibn Milhan and `Amir ibn Fuhayrah.

This noble group headed towards Najd where the tribe of `Amir lived. On their way they stopped at a place called Bi'r Ma'unah which belonged to the `Amir and Sulaym tribes. They went to see `Amir ibn al-Tufayl, a nephew of `Amir ibn Malik who had extended protection to them. He, however, was very hostile. He urged his people to attack them but they refused and said: "We will not breach Abu Bara's pledge of protection."

He, therefore, went to the neighbouring tribe of Sulaym and asked them to join him in fighting the Muslim group. They accepted. Then they attacked the Muslims and killed them all. It was not a surprising outcome, because the Muslim group were messengers, not a fighting unit.

God informed the Prophet of what happened to his companions, sending the angel Gabriel to give him the news. The Prophet was in grief. Anas said: "I never saw God's messenger in more grief than he felt at what happened to the people killed at Bi'r

Ma'unah. He continued to pray against those who killed them for a whole month, until God informed him by revelation of their status with God. Their message was: "Inform our people that we have met our Lord and He is pleased with us and we with Him."

The Prophet's companions were also very sad at the loss of their brethren. Some of them, like al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwam named their children after some of them. He called two of his sons 'Urwah and al-Mundhir after the two we mentioned.

During the next four years the political and military situation of the Muslims fundamentally changed. The peace treaty of al-Hudaybiyah was signed between the Muslim community and the Quraysh, which meant that peace spread in Arabia. This provided the right atmosphere for people to look objectively on the message of Islam. They soon recognized its truth and they embraced it in large numbers. In the eighth year of the Islamic calendar, the Prophet sent his companion al-Harith ibn 'Umayr al-Azdi with a letter to the ruler of Busra in southern Syria, but this ruler who was appointed by the Byzantine Emperor ordered the imprisonment and execution of the Prophet's emissary.

When the Prophet learnt of this, he raised an army of 3,000 men and despatched it to Syria. It fought a hard battle against Byzantine forces estimated at 200,000. A large number of Byzantine soldiers were killed, and the three Muslim commanders appointed by the Prophet were also killed. The fourth commander was Khalid ibn al-Walid.

Commenting on the ferocity of the battle, he later said: "Nine swords were broken in my hand during the Battle of Mu'tah. Only a Yemeni sword was good enough for me." We wonder how many did he kill with those nine swords before they were broken. How many were killed by the swords of the rest of the Muslim army.

The Muslim casualties were no more than 12. Khalid, however, realized that the disparity between the two forces gave the Muslims no chance. He needed all his military genius to ensure the withdrawal of the Muslim forces with minimum casualties.

His action was described by the Prophet as a success. He told his companions in Madinah that the three commanders he appointed were killed. "The banner was then taken over by a man

who is one of God's swords, and he fought until God granted them success."²⁶

* * *

1. Every one of us should try to juxtapose the two scenes and think carefully about them together so as to formulate a perspective that combines them both. The first thing the Prophet said when he was asked to send a group of his companions to Najd was to express his worry: "I fear what the people of Najd may do to them." He did not send them until he was assured that they would be under the protection of the chief of the `Amir tribe. We also note that the number of the people killed was large, equal to the martyrs who fell in the Battle of Uhud. Yet these were peaceful emissaries, not an army ready to fight anyone.

2. We also note that the Prophet was in much grief for them as they were among his best companions and they were learned. The rest of his community shared his grief. Yet the Prophet did no more than pray for God's help, raising his hands in supplication. He did not raise an army to attack the aggressors, take revenge and teach the offending tribes a hard lesson. They were not very far, as their quarters were about 200 kilometres from Madinah. On the other hand, four years later he raised an army of 3,000 men to teach a lesson to those who killed only one of his emissaries, although they lived around 1,000 kilometres from Madinah. The contrast raises the question: why did he not send an army in the first incident although it was a much worse crime with a large number of victims who were treacherously killed?

A careful look should tell us that the Prophet did not want to add to the burden of the Muslim community and cause his people further losses when they were still weak. The setback of Uhud was still fresh in their minds. The Muslim state was still in the fledgling stage. Hence sending an army into the Arabian desert among hostile tribes involved taking great risks.

²⁶ Ref: al-Bukhari, *Sahih, hadith* No. 1246 & 4262; Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 2, p. 51; Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah*, vol. 6, pp. 412-438; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 7, p. 512.

3. Precipitate confrontations at that stage could have had devastating effects on the rising Muslim state. It is clear that angry feelings were checked by the need to show patience in adversity. They needed to defer to a careful calculation of possible consequences.

The Prophet who said that he feared what the people of Najd might do to his companions had received revelations such as: "Have no fear of them, but fear Me if you are truly believers." (3: 175) "Have no fear of men but fear Me." (5: 44) "How often has a small host triumphed over a large host by God's grace." (2: 249) It was he who said to his friend when they were facing a very hard situation: "Do not grieve, for God is with us." (9: 40) He was the one person who had best knowledge of God and who was most conscious of Him. He had absolute trust in God and relied on Him alone. He wanted to give a lesson that maximum care should be exercised when managing the affairs of the community. No confrontation should be sought without careful consideration. There is a wide gulf between caution and cowardice.

4. In the eighth year, the Muslims had no worry about the Arabian tribes after they had entered into the al-Hudaybiyah peace treaty and had ended the threat of the Jews of Khaybar. Their numbers were much greater. As such, they were ready to confront an enemy. Therefore, when the Prophet's single emissary was killed at a faraway place, the Prophet took action, sending an army, 3,000 men strong, to Syria to fight a fierce battle that paved the way for the liberation of areas that were under Byzantine rule.

The Prophet teaches us this lesson to tell us that jihad should not be controlled by emotion or reaction. It must never be a spontaneous adventure. It should be based on a well considered strategy with well defined objectives and after proper preparations.

13. Ansari Hospitality

As he arrived in Madinah, he looked so tired and hungry. Therefore, he went straight towards God's messenger of whom God says: "The Prophet has more claim on the believers than they have on their own selves; and his wives are their mothers." (33: 6) As this is the status of the Prophet's wives with regard to all Muslims, the Prophet is their father. As this man reached him, his condition made its silent appeal: "Messenger of God, I am in a dire condition."

The Prophet immediately sent to one of his wives asking whether she had some food for his guest, but her reply was: "By Him who sent you with the message of the truth, I have nothing other than water." He sent to another, then a third, but they all made the same reply. They had nothing except water. The Prophet then turned to his companions and asked: "Who will be this man's host tonight, may God bestow His grace on him?" Abu Talhah said: "I will take him home."

Abu Talhah then went home and said to his wife: "Please be hospitable to the Prophet's guest. Do not spare anything." She said: "By God, I have nothing except our boys' dinner." He said: "If the boys ask for their dinner, pacify them and send them to sleep. Then prepare your food and light your lamp. When our guest comes, put your food before him. When he starts to eat, go and put out your lamp. She did as her husband told her, put her boys to sleep, prepared the food and lighted the lamp. When the guest arrived, she put before him the little food they had, then she went up to the lamp, pretending to try to increase its light but she put it out. Then she and her husband sat with the guest, and both of them gave some noise to give him the impression that they were eating. The guest also ate until he finished the food without realizing that he was the only one eating. His hosts went to sleep without eating anything.

At the break of dawn, Abu Talhah went to the mosque to offer the dawn prayer with the Prophet. The Prophet, who had prayed that God will bestow His grace on him for taking his guest home,

gave him another happy promise, saying: “God was pleased with what you and your wife did last night for your guest.”

An aspect of this divine pleasure was that He revealed in the Qur'an a statement that Muslims will continue to recite for the rest of human life: “They give others preference over themselves, even though they are in want.” (59: 9)²⁷

* * *

1. The Prophet was the main support of all believers. Whenever any of them was in need of help, or experiencing distress, he would knock at the Prophet's door for help. This exhausted and hungry man went directly to the Prophet and put his case in a very short statement. He only said: “Messenger of God, I am in a dire condition.” He found a quick response. He did not have to leave the place before the necessary action was taken and the remedy was found.

That was the sort of responsibility the Prophet exercised over the affairs of the Muslim community. It was not an exercise of power or a show of splendour and greatness. His definition of it was: “I am more responsible for all believers than themselves. Whoever leaves behind some property, it belongs to his family, and anyone who leaves an outstanding debt or young dependants, I will take responsibility for these.”

2. We note that the Prophet started by taking action himself to meet the need of this man. He sent to one of his wives asking her to send him some food. When he found that she had nothing, he sent to another. He sent to them all until he established that there was nothing in his home with which to help the man. It was only then that he asked his companions to help. The Prophet set the example practically before he said anything. Whenever he pointed out a good practice, he was the first to do it. Therefore, his companions unhesitatingly followed his lead, showing eagerness and dedication. In this case, Abu Talhah gives us an example of the

²⁷ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3798 & 4889; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2054. See also: al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 11; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 7, p. 119.

response of the Prophet's companions. With His perfect knowledge of His messenger, God tells us: "In God's messenger you have a good model to emulate." (33: 21) We need to always remember this fact. Every scholar, advocate of Islam, educator and teacher is in great need of this example. They need to provide the lead by implementing what they teach. We should all remember the maxim: "Do not speak to me about yourself. What your actions tell me is more than enough."

3. What Abu Talhah did was a great example of giving the little one has to someone else. He preferred that he, his wife and children should forgo their dinner and go to sleep without having anything to eat in order to give the food to someone who was in greater need for it. What was even more wonderful was that he wanted to spare his guest any embarrassment. He realized that his guest would not have been happy to eat if he knew that he was eating and his host was hungry. He therefore, put out the light and pretended that he and his wife were chewing and swallowing the food, so that his guest would have enough of the little food that was in the house. It is a most amazing scene. God Himself noted this great sense of hospitality and recorded it in the Qur'an that would be recited for the rest of time. When we are full of amazement at this deed, we should remember that this is the result of what the Prophet did in educating his companions and giving them the right perspective.

4. We also note how the family reacted to the situation, cooperated to make it appear very natural, with husband and wife playing their roles accurately. The wife had to overcome her maternal feelings in order to offer her children's dinner to the family's guest. She also went hungry. Both she and her husband complemented each other in order to ensure that the guest felt himself to be welcome, despite the little food that was on offer. She thus helped her husband in his effort to obey God and be hospitable to the Prophet's guest.

Such complementarity of roles and mutual help in doing what is good could not have taken place without the woman being a full believer and having a good grasp of the religious values. Hence, her positive response was spontaneous. She raised no objection, although Ansari women used to assert their independence and their role in family life.

This highlights the importance of women shouldering their responsibilities with conviction. Society should make sure that both man and woman realize that they have a common cause which they both serve.

5. The story provides evidence of the status of the Prophet. It was he who told Abu Talhah that God was pleased with their behaviour with their guest. This took place in the darkness of the night. The guest himself was unaware of it. In fact signs of prophethood were very frequent and witnessed by his companions: "Thus those who have been granted revelations in the past may be convinced and the believers may grow yet more firm in their faith; and so those who have been granted revelations and the believers will entertain no doubt." (74: 31)

6. We note how the Prophet lived in poverty. A person is sent to each one of his wives requesting food for the Prophet's guest but finds nothing except water. This is due to the fact that the Prophet gave everything to his community. He spared them nothing. His home had nothing of luxury. Indeed there was nothing in his home that could give proper comfort. Months could pass by and no fire is lit for cooking in his home. Yet his companions remarked that his generosity knew no limit. Hundreds of camels would be given away when he had them. Money would be given to his people and they would fill their pockets. No one ever mentioned that the Prophet kept some money for himself, denying it to his companions, or that he took for himself or his family anything that belonged to the public treasury.

7. The last point to make is that when the Prophet sent to all his wives asking them to send him some food for his guest but they had none to give to a hungry person, he gave the man some comfort. If this was how God's messenger lived, he should not complain about being poor.

14. O Mu`adh

He was a young man with little hair appearing in his face, but his face radiated with intelligence and his heart was full of faith. Yet he was one of the Ansar who pledged their loyalty to the Prophet and commitment to Islam in what is known as the Pledge of al-`Aqabah. He combined intelligence with sound upbringing, generosity and nobility. He was a handsome young man but he added to this good morality, generosity and insight into the Islamic faith.

He stayed close to the Prophet and this enabled him to memorize the Qur'an and to acquire an in-depth knowledge, which distinguished him among the Prophet's companions as the one who knew best what is permissible and what is forbidden. He enjoyed the Prophet's love and care which once manifested itself in a scene of closeness and special care. He was behind the Prophet as they rode a donkey called `Ufayr, to which was fitted a rein of fibre. What separated him from the Prophet was the rear end of the saddle.

As they were on their way, the Prophet called him as though he was at a distance: "O Mu`adh ibn Jabal." He said: "At your service, messenger of God." The Prophet was silent for a while, before he repeated: "O Mu`adh ibn Jabal." He said: "At your service, messenger of God." Again the Prophet kept silent for a while before addressing him once again: "O Mu`adh ibn Jabal." He said: "At your service, messenger of God." The Prophet said: "Do you know the duty owed to God by His servants." Mu`adh said: "God and His messenger know best". The Prophet said: "The duty people owe to God is to worship Him alone, associating no partners with him." They travelled on and after a while the Prophet said: "O Mu`adh ibn Jabal." He said: "At your service, messenger of God." He said: "Do you know people's right which God will give them if they do that?" Again Mu`adh said: "God and His messenger know best." The Prophet said: "If people do that, they earn the right that God shall not punish them, but shall forgive them and admit them into heaven. Whoever bears witness that there is no deity other than God and that Muhammad is God's messenger, sincerely believing it in his heart, God will make them immune to punishment in the

Fire.” Mu`adh said: “Messenger of God, may I tell this happy news to people.” The Prophet said: “No. I fear that they may grow complacent.”

Mu`adh was very pleased with this happy news, but he did as the Prophet told him, mentioning it to no one. Then the Prophet passed away. Mu`adh travelled to Syria, hoping to be a martyr in a campaign of jihad. It was not long before God granted him martyrdom on his bed as he contracted the plague. He said: “I am so pleased with what has happened to me; I would not barter it for the world riches.” When he became gravely ill and realized that the end was near, he said to the people outside: “Open the entrance of the tent so that I can tell you a *hadith* I heard from the Prophet. I did not wish to tell you of this *hadith* earlier for fear that you may become complacent.” He then told them what the Prophet had told him as he was riding the donkey with him and they were alone with nobody overhearing. Mu`adh did not like to suppress something he learnt from the Prophet. Therefore, he related it on his deathbed. The people who heard it from him were his closest friends who were present at the time of his death.²⁸

* * *

1. The first thing to note is the Prophet’s style of teaching, alerting the recipient to what is coming and inviting the learner to participate in arriving at the information he wants to impart. The Prophet chose a time when Mu`adh felt very close mentally to the Prophet. This is the result of being close physically and the special position of being behind the Prophet on his donkey. Thus, the time and the occasion were most appropriate to learn from the Prophet (peace be upon him). We then note the way the Prophet spoke to Mu`adh, calling him by his name and his father’s name, as if he was calling him from a distance, when in fact he could not be closer. Yet when Mu`adh indicated that he was most attentive, the Prophet remained silent. We can wonder what Mu`adh might have thought and what ideas came into his mind during those moments of silence the Prophet kept in between his three addresses. The way the

²⁸ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2856, 6500 & 7373; Muslim, *hadith* No. 30.

Prophet addressed him alerted Mu`adh, as did the silent wait each time. When, as a result, Mu`adh was most attentive, the information came in the form of a question: "Do you know the duty owed to God by His servants." Mu`adh's answer was the one an eager learner could give: "God and His messenger know best." The Prophet's information was thus received by a fully alert and eager mind.

The alerting tactics of having Mu`adh riding behind the Prophet, the call out to him as if he was at a distance, the silence after each call before a question is put to him came in succession to ensure that the recipient was on full alert. It is no wonder, then, that Mu`adh learnt this *hadith*, understood it and kept it in memory. He might have felt its meaning fresh in his mind throughout his life. Is it not amazing that his very serious illness and the approaching death did not make him oblivious of it? He reported it in all its details as a person reports something that has just happened. May God give His best reward to Prophet Muhammad, the best teacher of goodness.

2. Mu`adh was a young man in his early twenties, but the Prophet chose him to teach him something and make it clear that it was special for him. The Prophet did not allow him to tell it to other people, fearing that they would not understand it as Mu`adh understood it. This tells us that the Prophet gave everyone the sort of knowledge that was suitable for his understanding and insight. We will do well to follow his guidance.

3. It should be noted that the Prophet gave this very happy news to Mu`adh who was known to be very attentive to his worship. He was very absorbed in his prayer, with a relaxed approach, reading long passages of the Qur'an at an easy pace. He continued to do so until the Prophet told him not to make his prayer long when he led a congregation.²⁹ When the Prophet passed away, Mu`adh travelled to Syria, hoping to be a martyr for God's cause. `Umar suggested to Abu Bakr, the Caliph, that he should not be allowed to travel, because people needed him for his scholarship. Abu Bakr said: "When a man wants to be a martyr for God's cause, I will not prevent him." When Mu`adh felt that he was dying, he

²⁹ This is discussed in detail in Chapter 10.-

said: “My Lord, you know that I do love to stay alive but not to enjoy pleasant scenes and attend to farms; rather, to fast during the day, spend time at night in worship and sit with scholars in their circles.” This shows that Mu`adh understood the Prophet’s *hadith* as an incentive to offer more worship, enjoy standing for long hours in night prayer and compete in doing what is good. He had the knowledge and the insight to rightly understand this, rather than take the happy news given by the Prophet as a pretext for complacency.

4. It is particularly important to note Mu`adh’s understanding of the information given to him by the Prophet. The Prophet told him at the time not to tell people what he had told him. Mu`adh sought permission to do so, but the Prophet declined. However, just before his death Mu`adh told others of what he learnt from the Prophet, despite the Prophet’s prohibition. The fact was that Mu`adh understood the reason for the Prophet’s attitude, which was his fear that people might grow complacent. Therefore, Mu`adh informed his students who were attending him at the time as death approached. These were his close friends who studied under him and reported what he taught them. This means that he wanted the *hadith* to be known to scholars. He neither told it to the general public nor kept it to himself only. He thus chose whom to tell, as the Prophet originally chose to tell him. Some people might think that reporting this *hadith* is forbidden because the Prophet told Mu`adh not to inform the people. Mu`adh, however, feared that to suppress this information would be sinful. He looked at the reason why the Prophet did not permit him to publicize the happy news and realized that it was linked to the fear of becoming complacent. Therefore, he reported it to those who would appreciate the significance of the *hadith* and would not be complacent.

5. Is it not most wonderful that Mu`adh continued to impart knowledge at the time when death is so close? He could not abandon his task of education which he learnt from the Prophet. He taught Islam and its principles and details when he was in health and taught Islam and its principles on his deathbed. Had he sought an excuse for ceasing to educate others, his illness would be the one most appropriate.

6. Look at the Prophet as he went about in Madinah, riding a donkey with a rein made of fibre, and taking a young man from the Ansar behind him. That is a scene full of humility. How far removed from what heads of states do. No wonder, Muhammad (peace be upon him) was given a choice to be a Prophet and a King or to be a Prophet and servant of God. He chose the latter.

15. Good Example

The sun rose high in the sky while the Prophet was still in his blessed session with his companions. A group of Bedouins came over, having travelled a long distance to meet the Prophet whom they believed in. The Prophet saw that they were bare-footed, thinly clad. In fact, they did not have proper garments. Rather, they had some thick sheets which they cut and wrapped themselves with. Some of them had old top garments which barely covered their tired bodies. It was clear that they had been suffering scarcity of food and provisions.

As he looked at those clearly tired people, the Prophet looked depressed. He felt their hardship and realized that they were in dire poverty. He went home quickly and stayed a while. He then came back into the mosque and instructed Bilal to call the prayer. He led the congregation as they offered the midday obligatory prayer, Zuhr. He then stood on the pulpit and addressed the people. He started with praising God and thanking Him. He then said: "God has revealed in His book, the Qur'an: 'Mankind, fear your Lord, who has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the two of them spread abroad so many men and women. Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your ties of kinship. Indeed, God is ever watching over you.'" (4: 1) He also says: "Believers, have fear of God. Let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow. Remain God-fearing, for God is fully aware of all that you do." (59: 18) The Prophet continued his address and spoke about charitable donation. He said: "A person might have much or little but he could donate some of it for charity. A person might have a small quantity of wheat or dates but he could give away some of it." He went on urging people to donate, however little, until he said: "even if it is no more than half a date." When he felt that he had made his point, he sat down looking for his companions to make their donations in order to relieve the distress of the newcomers. Their response, however, was slow. As he waited, time went on very slowly. The Prophet was anxious, expecting something to happen, and this was clear in his face.

As he waited one of the Ansar came forward. Between his fingers he carried a small sack of silver currency that his hand could hardly hold. He said: "Messenger of God, this I give for God's sake. His gesture broke the wait and encouraged people to come forward with their donations. Abu Bakr started then 'Umar and others followed. Soon there was a heap of food and a heap of clothes in front of God's messenger. He was visibly delighted and his face beamed with pleasure. He was white with a touch of redness in his face. As he was so pleased with his companions' donations to those visibly poor people, his face looked like a plate of silver ornamented with streaks of gold.

The Prophet looked at what his companions had donated, but the sight that was still in front of his eyes was that man who ended the wait and brought the sack of silver. It was he that provided the urge for people to come forward with their donations. Hence he deserved to be praised. The Prophet turned to his companions to speak in appreciation of the man and his action. He said: "Whoever initiates a good practice in Islam will earn its reward and a reward similar to that of everyone who subsequently follows this practice, without diminishing their reward in anyway. And whoever initiates a bad practice in Islam will bear its burden and a burden similar to that of everyone who subsequently follows this practice, without diminishing their burdens in anyway."³⁰

* * *

We may reflect on a few points in this scene:

1. We note the Prophet's emotional reaction as he was terribly affected when he saw how wretched his visitors were. His reaction was visible in his face. He then was clearly upset as his companions were slow in response. Then we note that he was visibly delighted simply because the needs of those poor people were met.

That his face first showed his pain when he saw these people and then he was beaming with pleasure for their relief indicated

³⁰ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 18381; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1017; al-Nassa'i, *hadith* No. 2554.

how much he interacted with people and their problems. His were genuine feelings that showed in his face. His companions were able to read his feelings as they looked at him.

The Prophet we follow interacts in such a way with the distress of people whom he meets for the first time. They have just arrived. His reaction indicates how compassionate he was. No wonder, for God describes him as ‘tender and full of compassion to the believers’, and that he is a ‘mercy to all the worlds’. Every believer should learn this and follow the example of God’s messenger in his compassion and kind treatment of all people.

2. As the Prophet was so strongly affected by the sight of the poor Bedouins, he immediately responded and went home. He hoped to find something to meet the needs of those people. But what could he find at home when sometimes two months might pass without a fire being lit up for cooking? What could he find in a small home with few personal effects and nothing of worldly comforts? He then came out having nothing to offer. Nevertheless, he started with his own effort, as he used always to be the first in doing good. His good action always preceded his good words.

The Prophet who addressed the people urging them to be charitable used to give money in plenty. He once gave one man all the sheep that filled a valley between two hills. His action showed that he never worried about being poor.³¹ It was he who said: “Had I had the weight of Mount Uhud in gold, I would be pleased that in three days I would have nothing left of it, unless it be something I am holding to settle a debt.”³² As his death approached, he said: “We, Prophets, leave nothing to heirs: whatever we leave behind goes to charity.”³³ The Prophet was the most eloquent and most expressive of people, but his actions said more than his words.

3. The action of the Ansari man who gave the sack of silver to the Prophet shows the importance of good initiative. People came forward with their donations. Some donations might have been more in value than what he gave, but he took the lead and opened the way to more good action. Hence, the Prophet made his

³¹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3137; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2312 & 2314.

³² Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 6445; Muslim, *hadith* No. 991.

³³ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3093 & 3711; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1758 & 1759.

comment when all the donations were in front of him. His words were meant to praise the Ansari man in the first place.

4. The reports of this *hadith* do not mention the name of the man who took the initiative. They only mention that he belonged to the Ansar, which suggests that he held no prominent status. Leading companions of the Prophet, such as Abu Bakr and `Umar were present at the time, which tells us that no one should be reluctant to take the initiative and do what is good. The presence of those early companions of the Prophet who were known to be in the forefront of every good thing did not deter the man from taking the initiative. Thus, he earned his own reward and similar rewards to theirs, even though some of them might have given more.

5. The slow response by the Prophet's companions was not out of stinginess. Far was it from them to be stingy. They were people whom God spared them such a trait and He said of them that they would give preference to others over themselves, even when they were in desperate need. Perhaps their slowness was due to being a little hesitant to go home and bring their donation, or they were unclear about what or how much to give. When the Ansari man started with his silver, his initiative served as an urge to come forward and give more. He thus provided the example to be followed and was very generous so as to make others similarly generous.

6. "Whoever initiates a good practice in Islam will earn its reward and a reward similar to that of everyone who subsequently follows this practice, without diminishing their reward in anyway." This statement by the Prophet in this context explains the great and blessed effect of positive initiatives. When we contemplate the life of great and influential people and reformers we discover that it is a series of positive initiatives. Hence, their influence continues. Shaikh Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz was such a person who was always eager to take initiative. Whenever a chance to do some good offered itself, he was quick to start. His great knowledge was only one aspect of his distinguished status, but his great distinction was his initiative. Therefore, many of the good projects he started continued to function after his death.

Stephen Covey, the author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, describes taking initiative as the mother of all habits. He might have said that it is both parents of such habits.

16. Thumamah

The Prophet sent out a military expedition to ensure that the eastern front of Madinah was secure. The expedition took one of the chiefs of the Hanifah tribe captive. The man, Thumamah ibn Uthal, was not placed in a prison cell or an army barrack. He was simply tied up to a pillar in the mosque so that he could see the life and the worship of the Prophet and his companions.

The Prophet came into the mosque and as he was close to the man, he asked him: "What do you say, Thumamah?" The question was in no way intended as rebuke, insult or threat. What was expected was that Thumamah should be told what the Prophet wanted. Instead the Prophet asked him what he wanted. He answered as a confident chief would reply. He said: "If you kill me, you will be killing someone whose blood is dear; if you pardon, your favour will be appreciated; if you want ransom, you name the price." The Prophet left him without specifying any of these choices. He wanted him to closely watch the Muslim community in action so that he might divine what fate he was likely to meet.

Tied to the pillar in the mosque, Thumamah was well treated. His food was regularly brought to him from the Prophet's home, as if the Prophet wanted him to share his food.

Thumamah spent the first day tied to his pillar. He saw how the Prophet's high morality was reflected in the way he treated his companions; how he lived like an ordinary person in the Muslim community, although he was the acknowledged leader; and how he was kind and caring to all. Thumamah witnessed how the Muslims stood in rank, praying behind the Prophet in a great scene of worship. He never saw anything like this before. He also heard the verses of the Qur'an, as the Prophet recited these in his prayers. Every one of these scenes gave him a message to reflect upon. The following morning, the Prophet drew close to him and asked: "What do you say, Thumamah?" His answer was brief: "What I told you before: if you pardon, your favour will be appreciated." He said nothing more.

His answer shows that it was clear to him that the Prophet did not seek to inflict punishment and did not care for money.

Therefore, his answer was limited to what he felt that the Prophet would like to hear. The Prophet left him in his position in order to experience another day looking at the Muslim community and how the Prophet moulded it. He wanted to see and hear more about Islam.

The third morning, the Prophet came near him and asked him the same question: "What do you say, Thumamah?" He said: "Nothing other than what I said to you." He said nothing more, as if leaving the matter entirely to the Prophet after what he saw of his manners. The Prophet ordered that he should be released. Some of the Prophet's companions untied him. He was thus given an unconditional pardon by the Prophet. The Prophet simply wanted him to spend three days in his mosque, so that he would have a full view of what the Prophet and the Muslim community were like and listen to the Qur'an as it was recited. This was enough for Thumamah to leave the mosque in a condition that was totally different to how he came in. He left the mosque and went to a nearby date farm where he washed himself before coming back to the mosque. He stood close to the Prophet and said: "I bear witness that there is no deity other than God and I bear witness that Muhammad is God's messenger. Muhammad, I swear by God that no face was more hateful to me than yours, but today your face is the one I like most. By God, I was averse to no religion more than I was averse to your religion, but today your religion is the one I love most. By God, no city was more hateful to me than your city, but today it is the one I love most. Your people captured me when I was on my way to Makkah to do the umrah. What do you advise?"

The Prophet welcomed him and told him that he would have a good future. He advised him to continue his trip and do the umrah. Thumamah went on to Makkah where he performed the umrah. He also showed its people that he was a Muslim. Someone said to him: "Have you deserted your religion?" He said: "No, I have embraced Islam and followed Muhammad, God's messenger. By God, you shall not have a single grain from Yamamah unless the Prophet permits." He went home to Yamamah and he ordered his people, as he was their chief, not to send any grains to Makkah. That caused the Quraysh much hardship. They wrote to the Prophet appealing to him by his blood relation with them to relieve their hardship. They said in their letter: "It is you who urge kindness to kinsfolk."

The Prophet sent to Thumamah to let his people export their produce to Makkah, and thus the people of Makkah had their grains by the Prophet's orders.³⁴

* * *

The story offers several points to reflect upon:

1. The first thing to note is Thumamah's proud character. He was a captive of the Muslims and the Prophet was standing near him, but he was tied up to a pillar awaiting his fate. He was aware of different alternatives and perhaps he thought that a death sentence was the strongest possibility. Nevertheless, he was self-possessed as he addressed the Prophet. He clearly and bravely stated the alternatives that might normally apply to a person in his position. He would not stoop to beg or to flatter the Prophet. The Prophet, on the other hand, let him say what he wanted, as strongly as he wished. He did not do anything to make him feel humiliated.

His strength of character was subsequently placed for the service of Islam. He was proud of being a Muslim and he declared himself a Muslim in Makkah, where the Quraysh lived and they were hardened opponents of Islam. When they asked him about his position, he stated it with perfect clarity and courage. He declared himself a Muslim who followed God's messenger. He then declared his firm decision to stop the export of grains from Yamamah to Makkah, so that they would have to seek the permission of the Prophet. This was the result he wanted.

The Prophet respected people's characters and positions as well as their personal qualities. Therefore, when they accepted Islam, their good qualities served the Islamic message well.

2. When Thumamah accepted Islam, he was fully convinced of its truth, although the Prophet did not make any direct address to him or call on him to accept it. Nor did the Prophet offer to release him from captivity in return for becoming a Muslim. Thumamah's conviction was based on his observation of the daily programme of

³⁴ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 462 & 4372; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1764. See also al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 12, p. 87; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 8, p. 87.

the Prophet and the Muslim community in their greatest meeting place, the mosque. He also listened to the Qur'an as the Prophet recited it in prayer. What he saw with his own eyes and heard directly was enough for him to realize that Islam was the message of truth and that the Prophet was absolutely truthful. Therefore, he was strong in his belief, and continued to be so to the end. When great numbers of his people became apostates and followed Musaylamah, who falsely claimed to be a prophet, Thumamah was among those who rejected his call and remained steady in his faith. He worked hard to bring his people back to Islam.

3. Thumamah forced the Quraysh to seek the Prophet's help so that their food supplies from Yamamah could be restored. The Quraysh appealed to the Prophet on the basis of the principle he preached of kindness to relatives and kinsfolk. The Prophet could have replied that they were the first to sever relations and to be unkind. He could have also reminded them that they imposed a boycott on his Hashimite clan. Furthermore, they forced the Muslims to immigrate from Makkah, caring little for blood relations. The Prophet, however, did not remind them of any of this. He sent a letter to Thumamah to let the food supplies go to Makkah.

The Prophet never showed any desire for revenge. He treated his opponents on the basis of his own values and principles, not on their principles. His was a noble objective: he wanted people to look objectively at the religion God sent him to preach. This generous attitude by the Prophet was likely to be appreciated by at least a few of the people of Makkah. It would facilitate the way for them to become Muslims.

17. Salamah

Salamah ibn al-Akwa` was a young man when he accepted Islam and became a companion of the Prophet. He was tall, well built and endowed with abundance of physical strength. He might attack a large group of enemy soldiers on his own and emerge the victor. Few could match him in a race. His image was that of a strong man of good physical stature, in the prime of life.

Salamah had a unique experience at al-Hudaybiyah. That was the place close to Makkah, where the Prophet and 1400 of his companions encamped because the Quraysh would not let them complete their peaceful journey to visit the Ka`bah and perform their worship there. Emissaries went to and fro between the people of Makkah and the Prophet. They were making clear that the Muslims could not enter the city by force and the Prophet was assuring every single emissary that he had no intention of using force against anyone. He and his companions had no purpose other than visiting the Ka`bah and offering the umrah. Nevertheless, the unbelievers in Makkah were determined not to let the Muslim in, although this constituted a violation of the age old tradition that no one who wanted to worship at the Ka`bah might be prevented from doing so. Eventually, the unbelievers felt that the only way was to make a compromise. The Prophet was ready to accept any terms that ensured peace. This eventually resulted in the peace agreement of al-Hudaybiyah.

As the emissaries were coming and going between the two sides, the Muslims were waiting patiently, hoping that a breakthrough would come about. One day when it was time to take some rest, Salamah sought to have his rest in the shade of a tree. He prepared the area, removing the thorns and stones from underneath the tree, and lied down. Four unbelievers from Makkah came over, hanged their swords on the tree and sat down. They soon started to verbally abuse the Prophet. Like a true believer, Salamah was very upset. It was easier for him to hear the abuse of his own parents than to listen to abuse of the Prophet. Yet he did not want to take any action that would complicate matters between the two sides. He, therefore, moved to another tree, where he could not hear what those unbelievers said.

Shortly afterwards, Salamah heard a loud voice calling out to the Muhajirin [i.e. the Prophet's companions from Makkah]: "Ibn Zunaym has been killed." Salamah thought that the unbelievers have gone back on attempts to reach a peaceful settlement and went on a warpath. He drew his sword and headed towards those four unbelievers as they were lying down. He took all their swords and held them in his hand. He said to them: "By Him who has honoured Muhammad, I will strike with my sword any one of you who lifts his head. He then drove them to where the Prophet was. His uncle, `Amir, also brought 90 unbelievers who had tried to launch a skirmish against the Muslims. The Prophet looked at all these captives. He said to the Muslims: "Let them go, so that theirs would be the first treachery as well as the last." The Prophet let them go free.³⁵

* * *

The scene is highly significant:

1. No one could match the love the Prophet's companions felt towards him. They had believed in him, listened to his discourse, saw him in their midst and were in his company in different situations, some of which were hard and grave indeed. The more they knew of him the greater was their love. Yet Salamah was in full control of his emotions and actions when he heard the Prophet being abused by those four unbelievers who were with him under the same tree. He must have been extremely hurt when he overheard that abuse. We can imagine that his anger was at a high pitch. Yet he suppressed his feelings, bringing them under control, although he was not more than 20 years of age at the time. To restrain himself so as not to react in anger must have been very hard for him. Nevertheless, he left the shaded area he prepared and took himself away from them. He could have easily reacted emotionally and his physical strength would have enabled him to defeat those four men. He, however, did not want to start something which could cause far reaching consequences. Therefore,

³⁵ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2960, 4209, 6148; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1807; al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 12, p. 176; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 7, p. 465 & vol. 10, p. 543.

he controlled his emotions and restrained his anger. Even when he heard someone calling out what could be felt to be a treachery or unjustified killing, he did not rush to kill those four unbelievers, although he had the opportunity to do so. Their swords were hanged on the tree and they lied down, thinking there was no possibility of a problem. He simply took them to the Prophet to decide what to do with them in his capacity as the leader of the Muslim community.

Salamah thus gives us an important lesson in how to control one's feelings so as not to react on the spur of the moment in a way that could be rash or counterproductive.

2. We also note the high ethical standard shown by the Prophet in his dealing with those four people who were abusing him and with the other 90 people who were trying to engage the Muslims in a fight. He gave them all a free pardon, leaving them to bear the burden of treachery at every stage. He did not even give them a verbal rebuke for their misdeeds. His pardon was free and complete, in line with his noble character and highly refined ethics.

The Prophet had a clear aim and he wanted to achieve it without complications. That aim was to conclude a peace treaty with the people of Makkah. Therefore, he did not allow provocations by individuals or groups of unbelievers to disrupt his efforts or divert his attention. He overlooked the provocation, treating it as a diversion that was unworthy of his attention. He pursued his goal and achieved it. A treaty was written and endorsed, culminating in a clear victory. As he took his way back to Madinah, Qur'anic revelations were vouchsafed to him: "We have granted you a glorious victory." (48: 1)

A nation that does not have clear aims and a plan of action to achieve them will remain subject to unplanned reaction. Moreover, instinctive reaction by individuals may slow down the march of the community, lose valuable opportunities and impede the achievement of great goals.

May God grant His messenger peace and blessings. It is He who gave him revelations and wisdom: "He who is granted wisdom has indeed been granted abundant good." (2: 269)

18. A Loaf of Barley Bread

“I looked at the Prophet and I could see that he was hungry and his voice was weak. I felt very sorry for him. Do you have any food?” These were the words said by Abu Talhah to his wife, Umm Sulaym. Both were close companions of the Prophet.

Abu Talhah had passed by the Prophet a short while earlier and found him teaching the fourth surah of the Qur'an, entitled “Women”, to a group of his companions who were very poor. These were poor people whom he housed in a shaded area next to the mosque. He looked after them as they had nothing to live on. Abu Talhah realized that the Prophet was hungry as he noticed his pale face and weak voice. He could not wait, but went straight home to find out what food his wife might have. She told him: “We have a small quantity of barley, enough to fill a man’s cupped hands. If God’s messenger comes to us alone, he will have his fill and if he brings someone else with him, it will not be enough. He told her to make the dough and bake it, as he hoped to invite the Prophet to eat something with them.

Umm Sulaym made the dough and sent her son, Anas, to their date farm to bring some firewood to bake the bread. When he brought it, she made the dough into a loaf and started baking it. Abu Talhah said to Anas, his stepson who was the Prophet’s servant: “Go, son, to the Prophet and stand close to him. When he has finished his teaching, stay with him until the men with him have dispersed. Follow him up to his door and then say to him ‘my father invites you’. Do not invite anyone else with him, or else you will put me to shame.”

Anas found the Prophet still teaching his companions who were in a circle around him. They were around 80 people. Anas waited for the Prophet to finish so that he would invite him. The Prophet, however, said to him: “Has your father sent you, son?” Anas answered in the affirmative. The Prophet asked: “For a meal?” Again Anas said: “Yes.” The Prophet turned to his companions and said: “Well, get up and say ‘in the name of God’ and accept Abu Talhah’s invitation.”

The Prophet then took Anas's hand in his and they all walked towards Abu Talhah's home. We need not wonder how Anas felt as he walked, with his hand in the Prophet's hand. He must have felt the footsteps of this large number of people shaking the earth around him. He must have wondered what he would say to his stepfather who had warned him not to invite anyone other than the Prophet. Yet what could he say when the Prophet questioned him? Could he say anything but the truth? Still, how could their meagre food suffice for this multitude of people?

When they were close to Abu Talhah's home the Prophet's let go of Anas's hand, and he went fast to his stepfather. On entry, he said: "Father, I said what you told me to God's messenger, but he invited his companions and he brought them with him. Abu Talhah pushed him with his hand and said: "You have put me to shame in front of the Prophet. Are you not aware what food we have?" Anas said: "Yes, I am, but I could not say anything to the Prophet. He asked me whether I was inviting him for a meal and I could not lie. Abu Talhah was very upset and he turned to his wife and said: "Umm Sulaym, God's messenger has brought the people with him and we do not have enough food to give them." She said: "God and His messenger know best."

Abu Talhah went out to receive the Prophet. When the Prophet reached the door, he said to those who came with him: "Sit down". They sat by the roadside. The Prophet went in with Abu Talhah. Abu Talhah said: "Messenger of God, I sent Anas to invite you alone. We only have a single loaf which Umm Sulaym has baked. We do not have enough for the people I see with you." The Prophet said: "Get in and be happy. God will bless what you have."

When they were in, the Prophet said: "Umm Sulaym, let us see what you have." She brought the plate with the loaf on it. He asked: "Do you have any butter?" She said: "I have a small sack with some little butter in it." He said: "Bring it." When she brought it, it looked empty. The Prophet opened it and said: "In God's name. My Lord, bestow plenty of blessing." He then said: "Turn it over, Umm Sulaym. She did, and the Prophet and Abu Talhah squeezed it, until some drops came out of it. The Prophet took that on his finger and wiped the loaf with it, and said: "In the name of God."

The loaf started to swell. The Prophet continued and the loaf continued to swell until it filled the tray.

The Prophet then said to Anas: "Call ten of my companions to come in." He did so. The Prophet placed his hand in the middle of the loaf and said to the people: "Eat, in the name of God." They ate from the edges of the loaf until they had their fill. Then another ten came in their place and ate. They continued to come in, ten after ten, with no one left out, until they all ate their fill. Then the Prophet asked Abu Talhah, Umm Sulaym and Anas to come over and they sat with him. He said: "Eat." They and the Prophet ate as much as they wanted. Then he lifted his hand, and the middle of the loaf looked exactly as it looked before he placed his hand on it. He said: "Umm Sulaym, how does this compare with your food when you served it?" She said: "Messenger of God, had I not seen these people eating, I would have said that our food remained the same. Umm Sulaym then took what was left and gifted it to her neighbours."³⁶

* * *

Several aspects of this story deserve to be reflected upon.

1. The first point is that this noble prophet who remained hungry until the effect of hunger were clearly seen in his face and voice was the one to whom God revealed in the Qur'an: "Blessed is He who, if it be His will, shall give you better things than these; gardens through which running waters flow, and shall give you palaces too." (25: 10)

In His infinite wisdom, God withheld the luxuries of this world from His beloved servant, Muhammad (peace be upon him). Had He so willed, He would have placed all the comforts and luxuries of the world at his fingertip. God, however, chose for His messenger a life of poverty, scarcity and hardship for important reasons, such as:

³⁶ Ref: Ahmad, *Al-Musnad*, *hadith* No. 12034, 12806 & 13058; Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3578, 5381, 6688 & 5450; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2040

- a. The Prophet thus delivered his great and blessed message without having anything to gain in this world. He would never be thought of as advocating his message for any personal gain, pleasure or comfort. He exerted his best effort in the advocacy of his message and brought his community the happy news that they were to inherit the world's best riches, while he himself led a life of subsistence without taking anything from people or enjoying luxuries that they could not have.
- b. God determined that His messenger should lead such a life of poverty so that he would not have a business or investments to attend to. Rather, he would be one of the people, leading the same sort of life and enduring the same suffering. He would feel the hunger they felt, and share the life they led. In his simple life of poverty, the Prophet would maintain strong relations with people, many of whom were poor like him.
- c. The Prophet's poverty provides solace for the poor at all times. Everyone who suffers poverty will remember that Muhammad, God's most honourable creature, suffered the same poverty and scarcity.

2. It was not the Prophet's practice or manners that he should invite anyone to someone else's house if that person was not invited by the host. If he wanted to take anyone, he would first ask the host's permission. On one occasion, he was invited by a neighbour and asked him if he could bring his wife.³⁷ If someone followed him, he would ask the host if he would accept him. He once said to his host, referring to someone else: "This man has followed us: it is up to you to welcome him. Otherwise, he will go back."³⁸

On this occasion, however, the Prophet went to Abu Talhah's place with all the poor people staying at the mosque and known as

³⁷ This is stated in a *hadith* related by Muslim, *hadith* No. 2037.

³⁸ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2081; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2036.

“Ahl al-Suffah”. They were more than 80 people. His host, Abu Talhah, was keen that they should not know of his invitation because of the little food he had. The Prophet knew that God would be blessing that food in a clear divine sign that would be witnessed by all these people.

3. It is most remarkable that the Prophet sat to teach those poor people the Qur'an when he was so weakened by hunger that his condition was clearly apparent in his face and voice. In this extreme state of hunger, the Prophet had every reason to abstain from such efforts, but his keen desire to guide people to the truth and to deliver God's message to them gave him the will to undertake this task, hard as it might be. Indeed, teaching his companions the Qur'an, which is God's revelations, gave him spiritual nourishment of a totally different nature. He once said: “I get my food and drink from my Lord.”³⁹

4. We note the profound relationship between the Prophet and his companions. He sits in the mosque and around him are more than eighty poor people whom he is teaching the Qur'an. Those people travelled from their own places to meet the Prophet, enduring a life of poverty as strangers in Madinah. Yet they felt that to be a blessing, since they were with the Prophet. He, on the other hand, welcomed them warmly, sat with them, consoled them and showed that he was one of them. When he was invited to a basic meal, his refined manners did not allow him to go and eat without them, or to wait until they had dispersed. He could not imagine himself eating without them. Therefore, he took them with him, praying for God's blessing of the food, just like his brother Jesus prayed before him so that his disciples would have the Lord's supper.

5. The Prophet went along the way holding Anas's hand in his blessed hand, with more than 80 of his companions walking with him. Anas was in his teens while the Prophet was well over 50 years of age. This intimacy between the Prophet and a young man reflects perfect interaction between generations. Indeed, the fact that his companions belonged to different age groups did not place any barriers between them and the Prophet.

³⁹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 1965; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1103.

Such close interaction between different generations strengthens their ties and makes their relations flow very easily. It manifests a penetrative educational attitude on the part of the Prophet.

6. Anas went to invite the Prophet having been given emphatic instructions by his stepfather. He was fully aware that his stepfather and his mother had very little food. Hence he was keen to do as he was told. Nevertheless, when the Prophet asked him, he gave him the true answer. He could not have lied to the Prophet, not even if it meant his death. He realized that telling the truth to the Prophet exposed him to a very difficult situation. Yet this was easier than telling a lie when he was brought up with the value of the truth very high in his mind. No wonder, he was a graduate of the Prophet's school, and stating the truth was one of its main ethics. It was the Prophet who instructed them in the implementation of God's order: "Believers, have fear of God and be among those who are truthful." (9: 119)

7. This miracle of the dinner took place in front of this large number of people. They were all witnesses to what they saw with their own eyes. It did not happen to people who were unbelievers, but to those who had believed in God, His messenger Muhammad and the religion of Islam. Hence, it was an act of grace God has given them so that their faith would be strengthened. When such miracles occurred before such believers, their faith produced the most remarkable results history has witnessed. It strengthened their faith in as much as it relieved their hunger.

8. Abu Talhah was at first distressed when he saw the number of people coming with the Prophet when he had little food to provide. He needed advice, and he asked his wife, Umm Sulaym, who was a wise woman. Moreover, she was not the one immediately concerned with the problem as her husband was. It was he who would receive the people and offer them the food he had. Hence, she looked at the situation more calmly and gave him a reassuring answer: "God and His messenger know best." She reminded him that the Prophet knew what little they had, because their home was just like one of his homes because of the frequent interaction between them. Thus, Umm Sulaym put the problem in

the right perspective and referred it to a great person. She realized that a great problem required a great man to solve it.

9. The Prophet said to Anas: “Has your father sent you, son?” The Prophet dealt with all his companions in a fatherly way. We almost feel Anas’s delight as this word, son, resounded in his ears and filled him with pleasure as he felt that he was especially close to the Prophet. We also note that Abu Talhah said to him: “Go, son, to the Prophet... and tell him: my father invites you.” The parenthood Abu Talhah repeated was that of care. Anas was his stepson. When we realize that we understand that the Prophet imparted a great feeling of parenthood to his companions so that the whole society reflected all the feelings and love of a single family.

19. The Flag

Anyone who approaches the valleys of Khaibar realizes that its plains stretch far and wide with date trees, while on its mountains its Jewish population built their forts. The Jews only fought from behind the walls of their forts. When the Prophet received intelligence that the Jews of Khaibar were forging an alliance with the Arab tribe of Ghatafan to attack Madinah, he moved fast and arrived at Khaibar before the Jews could complete their preparations. The Prophet never launched a surprise attack on any enemy, but he used the element of surprise by moving at speed and showing the enemy that they were no match for the Muslim forces. When he arrived at Khaibar, the Jews retreated into their forts. As Khaibar was a series of forts, he had to besiege one fort after another. He took a few and then besieged al-Qamus, the most impregnable of the Jewish forts. The Jewish defences were strong and the siege lasted more than two weeks without a breakthrough. The Prophet gave the flag one day to Abu Bakr and he fought hard but without success. The Prophet then gave the flag to `Umar and he fought hard without success. One evening, the Prophet said: "I will give the flag tomorrow to a man who loves God and His messenger, and who is loved by God and His messenger. He is no deserter, and he will not come back before God grants him victory."

That night all discussion among the Prophet's companions was about the man who would be given the flag. He was spoken of in such great terms and the victory would be his. Many hoped to have that honour. Indeed everyone who thought that he had a special position with the Prophet entertained such hopes. `Umar said: "I never looked up to a position of leadership except that day." One man, however, did not entertain such hopes, not because of any shortage in his qualities. Indeed, he combined all virtues. Nor was it because of any laziness; he was always in the forefront of every good thing. It was only because he was physically unfit for fighting or carrying the flag. He was suffering severe conjunctivitis and he could see nothing in front of him.

When the Prophet and his companions offered their dawn prayers, the Prophet's companions were trying to be conspicuous

before the Prophet, with each one hoping to be given the great honour of having the flag. The Prophet said: "Where is `Ali ibn Abi Talib?" They told him that he had an eye complaint. Perhaps they thought that he would choose someone else. The Prophet said: "Send someone to call him." He was brought to the Prophet with someone leading him, as he could not see. The Prophet placed `Ali's head in his lap and put a little of his own saliva on his fingers and wiped `Ali's eyes. `Ali's ailment disappeared, as though he had no complaint. The Prophet gave him the flag and said to him: "Go forward and do not turn back until God has granted you victory."

`Ali took the flag and went out running, with the people following him. He did not go very far when he stopped. Without turning back, he shouted as loudly as he could: "Messenger of God, over what shall I fight these people? Do I fight them until they accept our way?" The Prophet replied in a loud voice and he was heard by `Ali and all the people with him: "Go on until you get to their place, then call on them to accept Islam and the duties they owe to God when they become Muslims. By God, if God guides one person to the truth through you, this will be better for you than anything the world can offer."

This man, loved by God and His messenger, carried the flag up to the open area before the fort. He then called on its people to accept Islam, and he reminded them of the duties they owed to God. They, however, replied by starting the fighting. He, very brave as he was, fought them very hard, and God granted him victory on the same day.⁴⁰

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A few observations need to be made here:

1. The absolute clarity of the ultimate goal. We need only to remember that as the Muslims were confronting the Jews and getting ready for battle, they must have remembered the series of treacherous attempts by the Jews to undermine the Muslim

⁴⁰ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 4209 & 4210; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1807, 2404, 2405, 2406 & 2407.

community over a period of seven years of close contact between the two parties. It started with the provocations by the Jewish tribe of Qaynuqa`, followed by the wicked attempt by the al-Nadir tribe to assassinate the Prophet and culminating by the treason of the Qurayzah. Thus the Jews showed unabating enmity towards the Muslims, manifesting itself in alliances with other enemies to eradicate Islam and the Muslim community. Despite all this, revenge was not in the minds of the Muslims on this occasion when their troops were getting ready for a hard battle.

In their position, the Muslims overlooked Khaibar and saw its valleys and plains which constituted the largest reservoir of food supplies in Arabia in the form of vast areas of date farms that extended beyond the reach of eyesight. The Muslims looked at the Jewish forts, realizing that they contained a great wealth of gold and silver, as the Jews were always skilful in this. Yet poor as the Prophet's companions were, all these riches were not for them part of the aim of the ensuing battle.

The goal was much nobler than any desire of revenge or material gains. The real goal was to provide guidance for mankind so that people would worship their Creator and fulfil their duties towards Him. We recognize in this scene an aspect of God's design: `Ali moves a short distance before discussing with the Prophet the purpose of his assignment. He shouts his question and the Prophet gives him the answer so that everyone would hear and be clear of the ultimate goal. The Prophet tells them all: "If God guides one person to the truth through you, this will be better for you than anything the world can offer." This is the sense of proportion Islam teaches: if one person recognizes the truth and willingly accepts God's guidance, then the most precious jewel is gained.

2. When the Prophet mentioned the person to whom the flag would be given and who would achieve the desired victory by God's help, he did not mention that he was a relative of his. `Ali was the Prophet's own cousin and his son-in-law. The Prophet only mentioned his personal standing and qualities of leadership. These were:

- a. He truly and completely loved God and His messenger. Indeed every Muslim shared in this love, but `Ali's was of a particularly superior nature.

- b. He followed God's messenger without any hesitation. Therefore, God and His messenger loved him, as clearly indicated in the Qur'anic verse that says: "Say: "If you love God, follow me; God will love you and forgive you your sins." (3: 31)
- c. He was a man of courage who never deserted in a confrontation. Indeed, courage found its home in `Ali's heart.

These were the great qualities that called for `Ali when he was absent, and put him ahead of others when he could not hope for it because of his illness. They were the qualities that gave him the victory medal when neither he nor anyone else might have thought he would be the one to achieve it. We note that the Prophet associated this great achievement with `Ali's qualities and qualifications. He thus made clear that nations and societies can only achieve success when they assign responsibilities to those who are truly qualified to undertake them. Failure is certain when unqualified persons are favoured with high positions. The Prophet says: "When responsibilities are assigned to people who are unqualified, doomsday approaches."⁴¹

3. Another aspect of note is the spirit of competition among the Prophet's companions and its subject matter. Leadership was not their primary purpose. However, when the Prophet mentioned these qualities, they all wanted to be that person. They were talking about it through the night. At dawn break they gathered around the Prophet and everyone hoped to be the chosen person. Perhaps everyone felt like `Umar who said: "I never looked up to a position of leadership except that day." They hoped that they were loved by God and His messenger. Indeed, applicable to them was the Qur'anic description: "They vie with one another in doing good works, and they are the ones who are foremost in them." (23: 61)

⁴¹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 59.

4. May `Ali, the fourth Caliph, rejoice and be happy. He walked on earth but he was the one loved by God and His messenger.

20. The Boat People

When Prophet Muhammad received his message, he started to call on people in his hometown, Makkah, to believe in God and associate no partners with him. His advocacy remained a private matter for three years during which he only approached individuals whom he felt would give him a positive response. He was then ordered to go public and announce his message to mankind, starting with his own people. However, his message received a very hostile reception from the elders and chiefs of the Quraysh, his own tribe. A campaign of persecution followed, targeting the weaker and more vulnerable elements among the Prophet's followers. After two years of unabating persecution, the Prophet advised a number of his companions to immigrate to Abyssinia, where Negus, the king, was a fair ruler and they might not be ill-treated by him. A total of 101 men and women immigrated. They were given asylum by Negus and they suffered no hardship from his government. However, the local people's attitude was diverse and the immigrants were subjected to different types of pressure. Some returned home at different times, and some stayed on, as the Prophet's instructions made clear that they should stay.

Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin, and his wife Asma' bint 'Umayy, as well as a good number of their fellow immigrants spent 15 years in Abyssinia, realizing that they were on a mission for God's sake. Then the Prophet sent his companion 'Amr ibn Umayyah al-Damri to Abyssinia, requesting Negus to send those immigrants back. Negus complied, sending them in two boats. The Prophet was very pleased to receive them and their fellow Muslims were delighted with this happy reunion.

One day, Asma' bint 'Umayy went to visit Hafsa, the Prophet's wife. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, Hafsa's father came in when Asma' was still with her. He asked who her visitor was. Hafsa said: "This is Asma'." 'Umar said: "Is she the one who travelled by boat? Is she the Abyssinian?" Asma' said: "Yes". 'Umar said: "We have had the honour of immigrating with the Prophet before you. We have a better claim than yours to the companionship of God's messenger." Angry at what he said, Asma' retorted: "No, by God. You were with God's messenger (peace be

upon him) who fed those of you who were hungry and admonished the ignorant, while we were in the land of hostile strangers, staying there only for the sake of God and His messenger. We were abused and we often experienced fear. By God, I shall not eat or drink until I have mentioned what you have just said to God's messenger. By God, I shall not lie and shall not be guilty of distortion or exaggeration." When the Prophet came in, she said: "God's Messenger! `Umar has just said this and that." The Prophet asked her: "What did you say to him?" She mentioned what she said to `Umar in the same words. The Prophet said: "He does not have a better claim to me than you. He and his fellow Muslims have the reward of one immigration, while you, the people of the boat, shall have the reward of two emigrations." The Prophet thus assured her of the reward of one immigration to Abyssinia and one to Madinah.

One cannot imagine how delighted Asma' was with this great piece of news given to her by the Prophet. She was assured that that she and her fellow immigrants were credited with two immigrations for God's sake, and as such, they were in the lead. In her delight, Asma' informed others of what the Prophet told her. The people who came with her on the boat from Abyssinia were soon coming in groups to see Asma' and ask her to report to them exactly what the Prophet said. Nothing in this world gave them more joy and greater happiness than what she told them. She said: "Abu Musa al-Ash`ari came over more than once asking me to repeat this *hadith*.⁴²

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1. We note first how eager Ja`far and his wife Asma' were to sacrifice their all for Islam. They and their group spent those long years in a foreign country, living among people who shared neither their religion nor their language. Yet they remained there until they were recalled by the Prophet. They immediately returned, but not to a life of comfort. They came back to start another phase of their struggle for their faith. They returned in year 7 of the Prophet's settlement in Madinah, but only a few months later, Ja`far was a commander in the Muslim army that fought the Battle of Mu'tah.

⁴² Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3136, 3876, 4230 & 4231; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2503.

He was killed in that battle, leaving his wife to endure the pains of losing him after what they had endured in their exile. Theirs was a life devoted to God's cause.

2. We also note how the Prophet's companions competed in doing what pleased God and His messenger, hastening to do every good thing. The life of that community was remarkable indeed: it was a life of a continuous attempt to reach to the sublime. We note this in `Umar's words to Asma': "We have had the honour of immigrating with the Prophet before you." It was `Umar who also said: "Whenever I tried to do some good ahead of Abu Bakr, I discovered that he had beaten me to it." Evidence of the same spirit is found in the complaint made by the Prophet's poor companions that they could not compete with the rich for God's reward: "They [i.e. the rich] pray as we pray, and fast as we fast, but they have the advantage of giving to charity."⁴³ The boat people' pleasure when they heard what the Prophet said to Asma' and their delight described by her are telling evidence: "Nothing in this world gave them more joy and greater happiness than what the Prophet said concerning them."

3. What should also be noted is that this competition was only in the field of great actions that sought God's pleasure: "For this [cause of Islam] let the strivers emulously strive." (83: 26)

4. Asma's attitude is most remarkable. It shows that she was fully aware of the role she played and the responsibilities assigned to her. She could have said to `Umar that she went with her husband and returned with him. Had she been merely a follower of her husband, this would have been enough for her. She, however, was very confident and well aware that she was fulfilling a task. Hence, she confronted him and swore that she would put the matter to the Prophet. She did just that. All this asserts the fact that she was absolutely certain of the importance of the mission she and her husband, as well as the other Muslims, were fulfilling.

This shows that Muslim women were full partners in the effort of advocating Islam. Hence, their efforts yielded great results which could not have been achieved, had women been merely marginalized followers.

⁴³ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 843; Muslim, *hadith* No. 595 & 1006.

5. When the Prophet heard Asma's complaint about 'Umar, he did not give her an immediate answer. He asked her what her own answer was. When she reported what she said in full, the Prophet confirmed it all. This was part of the Prophet's method of making his companions well assured of their positions. He was also keen to demonstrate that women's views should be well taken into consideration.

6. Finally we note the sort of relation between men and women among the Prophet's companions. The moral values were well observed, including the dress code and decent conversation. However, women were by no means marginalized. Hence the boat people came to Asma' in groups to hear from her what the Prophet said to her concerning them. She was always ready to report it to every group. We also note that in his delight with the story that he had already heard, Abu Musa requested her to repeat it to him and she was ready to oblige. That a Muslim woman must always appear decent and should cover her body does not detract from her right of full participation in the life of her community.

21. O Usamah

He went out with an armed expedition to subdue certain groups that had been causing problems for the Muslim state. It was perhaps for the first time he joined a military force. As he was one of the youngest fighters, he was full of enthusiasm, eager to show his courage. He felt highly motivated, hoping to meet in battle the bravest man in the enemy army and kill him. As the battle raged on, he marked out a fierce fighter with a particular group. When the group went on the attack, he was their front man, and when they retreated, he covered them. Whenever he met a Muslim soldier, he was able to kill him. Therefore, this young Muslim soldier and a man from the Ansar aimed to stop him. They engaged him and as they were about to kill him, he shouted: "There is no deity other than God". This was the word that would mark him as a Muslim. He obviously hoped that it would save his life, as Muslims must never kill Muslims. The Ansari man held his sword and retreated, but our young soldier felt that it was merely a cowardly trick. How could it be otherwise, when the man had just been killing Muslims? Hence, this brave young Muslim did not hesitate. He killed the man, feeling that it was the right thing to do.

As the bravest man among the unbelievers fell down, they were shaken. Their determination weakened and the battle ended in victory for the Muslims. A herald was despatched to Madinah to give the Prophet the good news. The Prophet was given a full report of the battle and how the Muslims coped with a larger force. He was also told how that particular person was killed and how he said, "there is no deity other than God," just before being struck. The Prophet was angry and he called in the young soldier, Usamah ibn Zayd, whom he loved like a son. He said to him: "O Usamah! How could you kill him after he had said, 'there is no deity other than God?'" Usamah said: "Messenger of God, he only said it out of fear?" The Prophet said: "Could you have opened his heart in order to know if that was the case?"

Usamah tried to explain to the Prophet that the man deserved to be killed, for having killed several Muslims. He said: "Messenger of God, the man was very hard on the Muslims and he killed this man and that man", naming a few of the Prophet's companions

who were well known to him. They were among his close companions who were often in the mosque and who fought to defend the Prophet and Islam. Usamah thought that he could thus show that the man he killed was a real enemy who well deserved to be killed.

The Prophet, however, overlooked all that, reminding Usamah once again of what brought a person into the Muslim community and gave him its full rights. He said: "What can you say on the Day of Judgement when you have to face the fact that he said, 'there is no deity other than God'?"

Usamah realized that the Prophet did not accept his excuses and that his action was one of wrongful killing. As such, it was a grave sin. Hence, he acknowledged his error and requested the Prophet to pray to God to forgive him. He waited a few moments hoping to hear the Prophet praying for his forgiveness, but the Prophet simply repeated what he said earlier: "What can you say on the Day of Judgement when you have to face the fact that he said, 'there is no deity other than God'?" Once more, Usamah said: "Messenger of God, pray to God to forgive me." The Prophet simply repeated his words. This apparently was repeated again. Usamah was in real distress. He wished that he could have become a Muslim only at that moment. This is due to the fact when a person adopts Islam, all his past sins are forgiven. Usamah's wish was only to benefit by this rule so that his earlier action would be sure to be forgiven.

The Prophet's method of educating his companions was very effective. Usamah learned the lesson and did not get involved in any of the troubles that later occurred when Muslims fought Muslims. He feared that he could take part in a conflict that resulted in the killing of a person who believed in God's oneness. He was a model for other companions of the Prophet. Indeed, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, one of the earliest companions of the Prophet, used to say: "I will never fight a Muslim unless I see Usamah fighting him." Sa'd only said this because he saw how careful Usamah was, steering away from any trouble that could result in conflict between

Muslims. May God shower His blessings on Prophet Muhammad who was the best of all educators.⁴⁴

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1. When we reflect on this story, we note that Usamah was very young when he joined this expedition. It is wonderful that a young lad volunteers to join an army with a clear vision and well defined aim. Needless to say that voluntary military service is normally preceded by mental, psychological and spiritual preparation. A volunteer must have achieved a high resolve and perfect belief in the cause he is fighting for. Moreover, the Prophet's remonstrations with Usamah shows that the latter must have arrived at a good stage of maturity. We can hardly imagine that the Prophet's address was aimed at an adolescent, a teenager. Perhaps those of us who have learnt this *hadith* sometime ago are surprised to learn that Usamah was still at this young age. Yet such was the Prophet's method of instilling the right values in his companions so that they would not lose sight of them.

2. We also note the powerful way the Prophet used to establish the concept of prohibition of shedding blood without valid justification. This principle cannot be violated for any reason and under any pretext. The Prophet took pains to make it very clear in the minds of his companions so that it became a barrier they would not try to circumvent. This is apparent in this very *hadith*, as we see the Ansari man checking himself and moving away when the man shouted "there is no deity other than God". Both he and Usamah had seen the man killing a number of Muslims, and both were very angry with him. However the moment the Ansari man heard him declaring God's oneness he stopped although he could have easily taken part in killing him.

The fact that the news of what Usamah did was widely circulated and given to the Prophet at the same time he was informed of the achievement of victory also indicates how the Prophet's companions were fully aware of it. Indeed Usamah

⁴⁴ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 4269 & 6872; Muslim, *hadith* No. 96 & 97.

himself felt very uneasy shortly after he killed the man. It clearly appears that the Prophet left no room for confusion or ambiguity. All his companions, and all Muslims, are fully aware of this basic concept.

3. Usamah ibn Zayd was the Prophet's grandson. Long before Islam, the Prophet adopted his father Zayd ibn Harithah as his own son. Hence, Usamah was called Usamah ibn Zayd inb Muhammad. However, Islam subsequently abolished adoption, and Zayd reverted to his original name. The Prophet continued to love Usamah as a grandson. When Usamah was still young, the Prophet used to wash his face. He also said: "Had Usamah been a girl I would have given him jewellery, fine clothes and other things." Once when he was still a child, Usamah tripped and fell down. His fall caused a cut in his head. The Prophet sucked the blood off Usamah's face and threw it away.⁴⁵ As Usamah grew up, the Prophet's love of Usamah also grew. He was known as the Prophet's favourite one, just as Usamah's father was also the Prophet's favourite companion.

When Usamah committed this error, the Prophet was hard in his remonstrance. We cannot appreciate how hard his words were unless we realize how close Usamah was to the Prophet. He would not accept Usamah's excuses. Even when Usamah felt the magnitude of his error and requested the Prophet's prayer for his forgiveness, the Prophet said nothing to him other than repeating his rhetorical question: "What can you say on the Day of Judgement when you have to face the fact that he said, 'there is no deity other than God'?" Despite his repeated appeals, Usamah heard nothing from the Prophet except this same question. No one had a better claim for a request of forgiveness than Usamah, but the Prophet did not grant his request on this occasion. Hence, the Prophet's decisive reaction had its telling effect on Usamah to the extent that he wished that he became a Muslim only on that day so as to ensure his own forgiveness. This effect remained alive with him for the rest of his life.

4. When we analyze Usamah's attitude we find several excuses and justifications for his action. To start with, Usamah killed the

⁴⁵ Ref: Ahmad, *hadith* No. 23931 & 24677; Ibn Majah, *hadith* No. 1976. Ibn Hibban, *hadith* No. 7056.

man in battle and the man was fighting against the Muslims, killing Muslims with his own sword. Usamah saw him piercing his sword in the bodies of some of the best companions of the Prophet. He also saw him doing his best to protect his fellow unbelievers. He was the front man in their attack and their rearguard when they retreated. When Usamah overwhelmed him, his clothes were still stained with the blood of some Muslims. He only said the word of God's oneness when he realized that he could not escape death. It was perfectly reasonable that he only said it as a ploy to avert death. He did not believe in it.

We, nevertheless, see the Prophet slamming the door against any such interpretation or justification. His strong remonstrations with Usamah shows that no one can judge people's hearts except their Creator. Hence, his rhetoric question to Usamah: "Could you have opened his heart in order to know if that was the case?" This means that all such justification count for nothing, even though they may be very close to the truth. Only the main principle of forbidding bloodshed is asserted. To open the way for justifications and excuses is extremely dangerous. One justification may lead to another and personal and ideological prejudices may creep in. In our present times we have seen how even a small opening in this area developed into the justification of shedding the blood of Muslims at a wide scale and on very flimsy pretexts. Most probably, the one who started all this could not have envisaged that it would lead to such consequences. The problem is that ideological behaviour often develops into something that gets out of control. Hence, the Prophet's guidance firmly shuts the door on any excuses and justification, making clear that bloodshed is absolutely forbidden. Whoever contravenes this prohibition leads himself to ruin.

5. We also note that the Prophet made his strong remonstrations in the case of a man who only said, "there is no deity other than God", at the last moment of his life, when he saw the sword falling over him. What can be said about a person who kills one who never believed in anything else?

May God protect us from error in our faith. Everyone remains within Islam unless he sheds forbidden blood.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ This is clearly stated in a *hadith* reported by `Abdullah ibn `Umar and related by al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 6862.

22. The Woman and Her Baby

A number of slaves from the tribe of Hawazin were brought to the Prophet. Among them was a woman who was going around in the area, with her eyes looking everywhere. Her breasts were oozing with milk. She was looking for her suckling baby which she appeared to have lost. Her bewilderment and anxiety attracted onlookers. The Prophet and those of his companions who were with him looked at her as she continued her search. Suddenly she found her child, picked it up, put it on her lap and gave it her breast, pouring her emotion with her milk. She was so emotional after she had found it and her worst fears disappeared.

The scene was highly emotional. The Prophet drew his companions' attention to it and asked them: "Can you imagine this woman throwing her child in the fire?" The question was both sudden and strange. The woman's action showed that she was almost out of her mind as she thought her child was lost. How could she throw it in the fire? Hence, the unanimous answer by the Prophet's companions: "By God, she would never do it, if she could at all spare him that harm." At this moment of their full attention, the Prophet gave them a great principle: "By God, God is more compassionate to His servants than this woman to her child."⁴⁷

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1. The first thing to note about this scene is the Prophet's fascinating method of driving his point home to his audience. He made use of all supplementary effects that could add to the clarity of his meaning. In this instance, the Prophet used the scene of the woman and her condition to great effect. He also sought to alert his companions' minds and emotions by asking them: "Can you imagine this woman throwing her child in the fire?" The very question held the minds of the Prophet's audience in suspense,

⁴⁷ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 5999; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2754.

waiting for what might come next. They wanted to know what the Prophet would say after they had given their answer. The Prophet made his point, using the woman's condition for comparison, so as to make his meaning very clear: "God is more compassionate to His servants than this woman to her child." May all God's blessings be to Prophet Muhammad, the best teacher of goodness who combined in his method of education a gentle approach, clarity of meaning, penetrative style and refined manner.

2. The scene could have ended with nothing more remarkable than a general appreciation of a mother's emotions. The Prophet, however, saw it as an opportunity to give a lesson that overflowed with the meaning of God's grace. Indeed the Prophet seized every opportunity to impart knowledge to his companions. He chose the best circumstances to drive his meaning home, taking into account the mode of receptiveness of his audience and their anticipation of what he might say. Hence, he used this scene to remind his audience of the grace of God, the most merciful of all who are merciful. No doubt, his short statement, linked to the scene in front of his audience, was far more effective than a long speech that might have sought to explain God's mercy. We need to learn from the Prophet how to use different occasions and situations to illustrate concepts and meanings.

3. The Prophet did not give this lesson in a classroom, a study circle, or a speech he was making. He was with a group of his companions looking at the slaves who were being brought in. Yet, the Prophet made the occasion one of education. Indeed, the Prophet's method of education did not rely on giving speeches or admonitions. His method sought to use life as it provided different occasions. He looked at every situation as giving an opportunity that could be used for education. This included sitting at dinner table, walking in the marketplace, having a walk in the street and sitting with his companions. Every occasion provided a chance to give a piece of information, in a precise manner that sought to use life experiences. Hence, his companions digested the knowledge he imparted to them and implemented it in their life.

We should learn from the Prophet's method so as to make use of life situations in order to instil good values in our children and families. We must not limit our efforts of education to long advice

or admonition. It is often better to give small but highly effective doses of advice, particularly when these are given as the occasion arises and without dwelling too much on any advice so as to make it boring.

4. The Prophet used the scene of the mother and her care for her child to illustrate the endless grace God bestows on His servants. This concept strengthens people's hope. Human experience knows no compassion greater than a mother's care for her children. Her compassion is at its greatest when the child is a baby in need of her care for survival. Her compassion becomes manifold greater if the baby is exposed to real danger. This was the case of the woman the Prophet and his companions saw searching for her child.

The Prophet then explained to his companions that God's mercy which He always bestows on His servants is much greater than the compassion of a mother in such a situation. His words are enough to fill every believer's heart with reassurance and happiness. When a believer does something good, he remembers God's abounding grace and hopes that his deed will be accepted by God. Should the believer commit a sin, he will remember God's unfailing mercy and hope for His forgiveness and grace. When a believer goes through a hardship, he remembers God's endless compassion and prays to Him to relieve his hardship, confident that God will not abandon him. When he is on his deathbed, a believer remembers that he is about to meet his Lord who is more compassionate to him than his own mother. He will then hope for forgiveness and look forward to meeting his Lord.

23. Umm Khalid

Her name: Amah bint Khalid ibn Sa`id ibn al-`As, but her father nicknamed her Umm Khalid when she was still a baby. How old was she? At the early period when a child is full of the life around.

She was born in Abyssinia, and she began to see life when her parents were still in their place of immigration, undertaking a mission for God's sake and for Islam.

In her early childhood she had an experience that she retained for the rest of her life. It was a very happy one and she was always glad to relate it. She continued to keep the article that was given to her on the occasion we are relating.

That experience took place when the Prophet had some clothes sent to him. He distributed them to his companions. At the end, there was a colourful dress for a young girl, with yellow, green and red stripes. It was a pretty dress that people looked at and admired. The Prophet asked his companions: "To whom should we give this dress?" None gave an answer in respect for the Prophet. As they awaited his decision, many wondered who would be the one favoured with that beautiful dress. The Prophet then said: "Bring me Umm Khalid." Someone went to her father and told him that the Prophet wanted to see his daughter. He carried her and placed her in front of the Prophet who looked at her and showed her the dress. He then put it on her with his own hands. As she wore it, her eyes were bright with her delight. The Prophet interacted with her and pointed to the different coloured stripes. He shared her delight and talked to her in an endearing way, imitating her pronunciation. Then he said to her that the dress suited her and was beautiful on her, but he said these words in the Abyssinian language that she learnt in Abyssinia.

The Prophet then prayed for the young girl and repeated his prayer several times: "May you wear and change your clothes." The girl relaxed as she listened to the Prophet and started to touch his hand. She was attracted by the seal of prophethood between his shoulders and touched it with her fingers. Her father told her to stop that, but the Prophet told him to leave her alone. Here we see

the Prophet's care for the child stronger than the parental care. Let the child do as she wanted. The Prophet, the most compassionate of mankind, loved every child.

As Umm Khalid grew up, the memory of this experience also grew in her mind. Hence, she kept the dress with her, although its colours faded. To her, it held the blessing of its being in the Prophet's hand, and held the beautiful memory of her meeting with him at her young age.⁴⁸

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1. Several points deserve to be highlighted in this story. It is amazing that the Prophet found the time to take care of the very private affairs of his companions. He felt that he should look after their children and bring a feeling of delight to them. He wanted to share with them their feelings of great delight in things that appear small to us but are great and amazing in their eyes. We should remember that the Prophet did not have any spare time, or light responsibilities. In fact, he had the greatest of responsibilities and the weightiest of assignments. Yet these small matters had their importance in his ethical perspective. Hence, we find him giving them time, interacting with children and sharing their concerns. He was sent to bring happiness to mankind in both this life and in the life to come. It was Prophet Muhammad who taught that "a delight you bring to a Muslim's heart counts as a good deed and a rewarding charity."

2. The Prophet could have sent the dress to Umm Khalid and that would have been fully appreciated by her family. Instead, he personally attended to the matter, in all its details, so that the purpose of his action, which is to bring delight to a person, becomes a Sunnah to be followed by believers. This is implied in the message of the Qur'anic verse that says: "In God's Messenger you have a good model for everyone who looks with hope to God and the Last Day, and always remembers God." (33: 21) We find

⁴⁸ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3071 & 5823; Ahmad, *hadith* No. 25811; Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 4024

many similar examples in the Prophet's conduct reaffirming this message and confirming this Sunnah of making others happy.

3. The Prophet brilliantly transformed his kindly act into a whole set of beautiful and highly appealing actions:

- He firstly posed a question as to whom the little dress should be given. He thus gave the impression of the importance of selection as if the dress was a medal.
- He then asked for the little girl to be brought in, rather than sending the dress to her.
- He went further and put the dress on for her.
- He followed that by talking pleasantly to her and sharing her delight.
- Moreover, he prayed for her and repeated his prayer.
- He then held her close to him, letting her touch his body and put her hand on what attracted her attention. He made that clear when he told her father to leave her alone.

This is in short a lesson given by the Prophet making clear that kindly actions may certainly express benevolence, but they may also be set on a higher level of refined manners.

4. The Prophet's method of dealing with children has clear aspects, such as:

- A kind welcome that lets the child feel happy.
- Getting the child at ease so as to make her draw closer. In this case, the young girl's little hand was touching the Prophet's body and inspecting something on it.
- No telling off to the child. In Umm Khalid's case, the Prophet told her father to leave her alone.

These are fine touches that took care of the child's feelings.

5. We need also to consider the Prophet's fine treatment of Umm Khalid on her parents. Can we imagine what Khalid ibn Sa'id felt as he carried his daughter to the Prophet when he was informed that the Prophet wanted to see her? What delight was in his eyes when he saw the Prophet dressing her with his own hands? How his face beamed when he heard the Prophet praying for her and speaking to her joyfully? Kind treatment of children is a kindness to their parents and families.

6. Every time the Prophet prayed for someone, the prayer was answered in the broadest and most expansive meaning and form. The Prophet's prayer for Umm Khalid was to wear her clothes and change them, which implied a long life. This was fulfilled, and Umm Khalid was the last of the Prophet's women companion to die.

7. If we imagine this scene and contemplate what actually took place, seeing all that the Prophet did, we should experience an eager feeling to meeting the Prophet and a yearning to see his face. If we do not, then our hearts need rehabilitation. Nothing will draw us nearer to the Prophet and appreciating his character better than reflecting on such scenes that are full of significance. They touch the heart and send it clear messages.

24. Carry On Playing

On a blessed day of Eid, the Prophet was at home with his wife, `A'ishah, and they were sharing the pleasure of that day when they heard noises of festivity. The noises were made by a number of Abyssinian people who had come to Madinah to meet the Prophet. On that occasion, they came into the mosque, carrying their spears and their leather shields, and they started their folk dances, and singing in their language. Theirs was an interesting and delightful sight. The Prophet asked his wife: "Would you like to watch them?" She confirmed that she did. The Prophet stood at the door of his home and his wife stood behind him, putting her chin on his shoulder and placing her cheek against his cheek. He covered her with his upper garment. Both watched the Abyssinian visitors as they performed their folk acts. He encouraged them to do their full performance, saying: "Carry on, Bani Arfidah". [This was a nickname the Arabs used in reference to the Abyssinians]. As they heard his encouragement, they were more enthusiastic in their dances in front of him. They could only express their delight in their own language, which he did not understand. He asked what they were saying and someone told him that they said: "Muhammad is a good person." `A'ishah later mentioned that she could only understand this from what they said.

As they carried on with their performance, `Umar entered the mosque, only to see something totally unfamiliar. He immediately took issue with them, taking some pebbles from the ground and threw them at them. He thought that it was not permissible to do what they were doing in the Prophet's mosque. The Prophet said to him: "Leave them alone, `Umar. They are Bani Arfidah." He implied that this was their way. The Prophet then turned to them and told them to carry on with their play, and they would be safe. He thus reassured them that no harm would come to them. He added further encouragement, saying: "Carry on playing, so that the Jews and the Christians would know that our religion is easy. I have been sent with a pure and easy message."

The performance continued with more play and singing, as well as a demonstration of military skills with spears and leather shields. The Prophet remained standing so that his wife would continue

watching. When he thought that she might have had enough, he asked her whether she did. But she was a young woman who enjoyed a good performance. What could be sufficient for the Prophet might not be enough for her. Hence, she answered him: "Messenger of God, do not rush me." The Prophet continued to stand for her, until he again thought that she might have had enough. He asked her, but she again said: "Messenger of God, do not rush me." When she felt that she had enough enjoyment, she thought of something else she needed, which was in no way less important to her. She wanted to show her standing with the Prophet. Hence when he asked her whether she had had enough, she begged him not to rush her. She later explained: "I did not care much for watching them longer. I only hoped that women would know how he stood for me and know my standing with him." Thus she satisfied herself, had enough fun and showed her standing with the Prophet. Then when the Prophet asked her once more if she had enough, she said that she had. He told her to go back.

The Prophet was not bored with standing in his position for her until she had enough. He did not leave until she left. 'A'ishah always remembered this incident and often reported it. She used to say: "God's messenger stood up for me and did not leave until I left."⁴⁹

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1. The first thing to note about this scene is the Prophet's genuine care for his wife and her feelings. He appears so keen to make her happy and to ensure her entertainment. It was the Prophet that offered her the chance to watch the Abyssinian dancing. He even called her by her nickname of endearment, Humayra', which has connotations of beauty in the Arabian environment. He then stood up for her to allow her to take her position in an intimate way that gives her feelings of mutual love and compassion, with her cheek close to his and her chin on his shoulder. He remained in this position until she decided to leave.

⁴⁹ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 454, 950 & 2906; Muslim, *hadith* No. 892; al-Nassa'i, *al-Sunan al-Kubra*, *hadith* No. 1798, 1800 & 8951.

All these were touches of tenderness, compassion and keen desire to make one's wife happy.

2. The fact that the Abyssinians chose to hold their performance in the Prophet's mosque on the day of Eid shows that the mosque was not merely a place of worship. It was a life arena where acts of worship were held and feelings and emotions recognized. It was the place where prayer were held, zakat was collected and war gains distributed, and at the same time where the community met on happy occasions and held their festive functions. Thus, life in all aspects was closely linked to the mosque.

3. We note also how Islam accommodates various cultures. Those Abyssinians expressed their joy on this occasion in their own traditional way which was totally different from the Arabian style. Playing with spears belonged to the Abyssinian culture, and they sang in their own language. Yet they were able to do their performance within the very first Muslim society, maintaining their own character and mode of expression.

4. The occasion was one of fun and pleasure, but the Prophet used it also for education both verbally and practically. He said: "Carry on playing, so that the Jews and the Christians would know that our religion is easy. I have been sent with a pure and easy message." Every aspect of his life was used to serve his great mission of delivering and advocating God's message.

5. Commenting on this scene, Imam Ibn Hajar said: "*This hadith* illustrates several useful points, including the desirability of providing one's dependents with what gives them pleasure, comfort and entertainment. It shows that the demonstration of pleasure at the time of Eid is an aspect of Islam.

6. The Prophet approved the style the Abyssinians celebrated the Eid, which was totally unfamiliar to the Arabs. This makes clear that different styles are permissible, as suits people's preferences, traditions, time and age.

7. The Prophet emphasized the wide area of permissibility and ease in the Islamic message. His faith cannot be reduced into a list of prohibitions or confined to a small area of commandments. Its perspective is broad and allows a wide area of permissibility. This is the right approach to life. Prohibition applies only to a small area.

God says: "It is He who created for you all that is on earth." (2: 29)
Thus the burdens that earlier religions imposed on mankind were removed. He wanted the Jews and the Christians to know that Islam is easy in its outlook, and that he was sent with a pure and easy message. It is Prophet Muhammad who permits people every good thing and prohibits only what is foul, removing people's burdens and chains.

25. It Is a Festive Day

She was a lively young woman who loved fun and entertainment, and on a festive Eid day that brings pleasure and happiness a few of her friends came over to visit her. They brought their tambourines, hoping to have pleasant time together. She was none other than `A'ishah, the Prophet's wife and the mother of all believers. The tambourines were played in the Prophet's home, and the girls sang some poems that told of battles fought by the Ansar. The Prophet came in, but the tambourines continued to be played with the girls singing. None of them felt too shy or scared when the Prophet entered.

The Prophet went straight to bed and lied down. He covered himself with his robe and brought it over his head, and he faced the wall. The young ladies continued with their singing and music in the Prophet's room that had the most pleasant smell of his breathing. The whole atmosphere was one of overflowing delight experienced by `A'ishah and her friends in the Prophet's own home that was free of all unworthy matters. The girls were still singing when Abu Bakr, `A'ishah's father, entered. He was surprised to find music and singing in the Prophet's home and he told the women off, saying: "How can you bring Satan's instrument into the home of God's messenger?"

The Prophet turned and uncovered his face. He said to him: "Leave them alone, Abu Bakr. This is an Eid day." In fact this took place during the days of the Eid of Sacrifice. The Prophet's permission gave the girls new encouragement and they continued, while Abu Bakr sat close to the Prophet. When `A'ishah realized that the two men were not paying any attention to them, she signalled the girls and they left.⁵⁰

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1. Several points need to be highlighted in this story. The girls continued to sing when the Prophet came in. His entry did not stop

⁵⁰ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 454, 950 & 2906; Muslim, *hadith* No. 892; al-Nassa'i, *Al-Sunan al-Kubra*, *hadith* No. 1798-1800.

them from doing whatever they were doing. The question arises: could the girls have continued to sing had they seen the Prophet looking serious or gloomy as he entered his home. They were young and he was held in awe by everyone who saw him. It would have been a natural reaction to stop, had they detected any sign of disapproval. This tells us that he entered his home with a smile on his face, and he must have given the girls a welcoming look of approval. This was his habitual attitude. When `A'ishah was asked what the Prophet did at home, her answer was: "He was an ordinary man, but he was often laughing and smiling." This means that his entry added to the pleasant atmosphere of his home, increasing the happiness of its inmates.

The Prophet's attitude gives a message to husbands and parents who look very gloomy when they come home. As soon as they enter, they start giving orders of do this and do not do that.

2. It appears that the Prophet did not enjoy the girls' singing. They were young and lively, while he was in his fifties. Yet he was pleased to see his young wife and her friends happy and having fun. Therefore, when he lied on his bed, he covered his head and faced the wall. He thus let them express themselves and continue with their entertainment, free from embarrassment. The Prophet's home did not have another room where he could have sat. Therefore, he separated himself from them in this easy way, to allow them to continue as they pleased. Could anyone be more considerate?

3. It is noteworthy that the Prophet understood the natural desire to express joy and pleasure with singing and playing the tambourine. Joy is an overflowing feeling and cannot be expressed by affecting an attitude of serious propriety. It is expressed by lively interaction, delightful action and activities that make everyone pleased. Hence, the Prophet gave people their fair share of all that on joyous occasions, such as marriage, the Eid, the arrival of travellers, etc. His companions expressed their joy in the different ways that suited them. Young women played the tambourine and sang, the Abyssinians performed their dances with spears and leather shields, as mentioned in the previous chapter, while others were satisfied to watch other people's pleasure and welcome it.

The expression of joy is part of human nature, and to allow it ample space and time is a Sunnah that the Prophet practised.

4. The Prophet's one-room home was adjacent to the mosque and it opened to it. When he was in his compartment at home, the Prophet used to hear his companions as they were talking in the mosque. When Abu Bakr was in the mosque he used to hear his daughter, `A'ishah, when she spoke and he could hear laughing. It stands to reason that when those young women played the tambourine and sang, their singing was heard throughout the mosque. What a pleasant way of sharing the joy and pleasure of the occasion: the singing in the Prophet's home and the audience at his mosque!

5. We may also admire `A'ishah's intelligent way of handling the situation. She did not stop the other girls' singing, particularly when the Prophet told Abu Bakr to leave them alone. Yet she did not let them continue for long. She let her father sit with the Prophet and the two to be engaged in some important matter. She then signalled the girls to leave, as though they had finished what they came for. This was a very gentle way of handling the situation.

26. Your Brother

His name was `Abdullah and he loved the Prophet most dearly. In fact, the Prophet himself acknowledged that and said: "He loves God and His messenger." One aspect of this love was that whenever he saw any sort of exotic food in the market of Madinah, he would love to gift it to the Prophet. A Bedouin may bring in some butter or honey and he would take it from him and give it to the Prophet. When the Bedouin came to `Abdullah for the price, he would take him to the Prophet and say: "Give him the price of what I gave you." The Prophet would ask: "Was it not a gift you gave me?" `Abdullah would say: "Yes, indeed, but I have no money." The Prophet would only laugh with him and give instructions for the Bedouin to be paid.

This sort of joking attitude reflects the easy familiarity between the Prophet and this companion of his, `Abdullah.

What remains to be told is that `Abdullah was a habitual drinker. He was brought to the Prophet absolutely drunk. As drinking intoxicants is an offence that carries a mandatory punishment of flogging, the Prophet would order that the punishment be enforced. On one of these occasions when the Prophet ordered his punishment and it was duly administered, someone among the Prophet's companions said: "May God curse him. How often he is brought here for punishment." The Prophet immediately censured this attitude, saying: "Do not curse him. For all I know, he is a man who loves God and His messenger. Do not help Satan against your brother."⁵¹

We need to reflect on several aspects of the Prophet's attitude which is remarkable in understanding the complexity of the human soul.

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⁵¹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 6780.

1. We can hardly stop contemplating the lively social bond between this man, sinner as he was, with the Prophet, who attained the summit of all that was pure and sublime, the man who taught humanity all goodness. Yet the relation between the two is that of friendship, love, jesting and familiarity. This shows us that the society the Prophet built was in no way exclusive; it did not split the community into groups or isolate anyone for an error of any type. It was a properly integrated society that excluded no one. People in that society differed in the degree of their adherence to Islamic values and principles. Some led the way in every aspect of goodness; others were moderate; and others still might wrong themselves by committing sins. Yet none was boycotted or looked down upon. Friendliness was characteristic of that society in all its strata. This ensured that the errors of those who erred remained of limited effect. The atmosphere of friendship helped also in preventing the spread of such sinful practices. Whenever anyone slipped into error, he found his brothers holding him, pulling him away from a pitfall that might have caused him to stay away from them.

2. Reflect, if you will, on the Prophet's reference to the positive element in `Abdullah's character, even at the time when punishment is administered for an error that has already been frequent. The Prophet stressed an important quality of `Abdullah, which was his love of God and His messenger. Yet this was not unique to him; indeed it is common to every believer. No one's faith is right unless he or she loved God and His messenger. Yet the Prophet highlighted this, praising the man for having it. This was an aspect of the Prophet's method of nurturing the good aspect in everyone. He was keen to expand the domain of goodness within everyone so as to associate a person with his good qualities and enhance his standing, even though he might have slipped and committed a serious error. The Prophet wanted to show how to disencumber people of their errors. We may imagine what effect the Prophet's words had on `Abdullah when he was informed of them. He must have felt elated and hoped to reach to a higher horizon at which he could overcome his tendency to err.

This is one of the best motives to get rid of one's errors. It helps a person to be certain that these are merely casual slips; they are neither an integral part of his character nor the criterion by

which he is to be judged. The essential part of his character is his love of God and His messenger. We must learn from the Prophet's perfect attitude that relies on stressing the positive elements in people's characters and expanding their area of goodness. We sometimes overlook this approach, making people's errors a high barrier between us and them, or making of these errors narrow cells in which we imprison them. Whenever they are mentioned, we mention, or at least remember, their faults and errors. We forget that by doing so we help Satan against them.

We should also remember that when the Prophet needed to speak of that man who was often brought to him drunk, he mentioned the best of qualities: "For all I know, he is a man who loves God and His messenger."⁵²

3. The sin committed by this man is clear. Indeed, it is one of the cardinal sins, and there can be no way to justify the man's error. The Prophet cursed different categories of people who are involved with the provision and drinking of intoxicant drinks.⁵³ Yet the Prophet, who ordered the enforcement of the mandatory punishment against this offender, ensured his right not to be molested or insulted beyond the mandatory punishment. He stated that going beyond it means helping Satan against him. Instead, the Prophet drew his companions' attention to the good side in his character. This is the aspect they should consider instead of focusing on the error the man committed.

Sometimes we take a dispute with our Muslim brothers to great extents although it could be over slips that are much lesser in enormity or clarity than the offence of this companion of the Prophet. Indeed their errors might be subject to diverse views and different interpretations. Nevertheless, we may at times unwittingly carry the question in dispute to greater limits, making it a definitive issue that admits no second view. We justify our persistence in argument by elevating it to a dispute of and for religion. Yet the

⁵² Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 1356; Ahmad, *hadith* No. 13330; Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 3095.

⁵³ This is a reference to the *hadith* reported by Ibn 'Umar, stating: "God has cursed wine: the one who drinks it, the provider of drinks, its seller and buyer, its producer and the one who requests its production, its carrier and the one to whom it is carried." Related by Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 3674; al-Tirmidhi, *hadith* No. 1295; Ibn Majah *hadith* No. 3380 & 3381.

Prophet's guidance was to protect the rights of the person who frequently committed a cardinal offence until people said: "How often he is brought in for punishment." Despite this, the Prophet did not allow his frequent offences to become a reason for cursing him when such curses were not part of the punishment God has specified for him. Indeed, he remained a companion of the Prophet whom he befriended, exchanged gifts and jested with. If we would only follow the Prophet's guidance, we will cause the area of goodness to expand and the area of error to shrink and be confined. Indeed we would strengthen ties in society and put an end to numerous cases of boycott between people under wrong pretexts.

27. No Anger

One day the Prophet was returning home, and most probably he was tired after a long day that was, like every day of his life, full of activities explaining his message to people. It was his regular attitude to speak to people in a most pleasant way and to extend every type of kindness and assistance that was available to him. At the end of the day, he would be physically and emotionally in need of some comfort and relaxation.

The Prophet approached his home slowly, and he was wearing a garment that had a thick edge. He put the edge around his neck and throw the main part over his shoulders. As he was close to his home, ready to enter, a Bedouin rushed to him and held the end of his top garment from behind, pulling it hard. The Prophet was totally unaware of the Bedouin and what he wanted. Hence, the pull took him by surprise and a) the Prophet's balance was disturbed and he stepped back and was very close to the Bedouin; b) the Prophet's robe was torn because the Bedouin had pulled it hard; and c) the edge of the garment pressed hard at the Prophet's neck. Anas, his servant, looked at the Prophet's neck, which was 'shining white like a pot of silver', only to see the clear mark the rough edge of his robe left on it.

It was only reasonable to expect that the Bedouin should feel embarrassed, apologize and assure the Prophet that it was all unintended, begging his pardon. Nothing of this took place. The Bedouin rudely said: "O Muhammad!" This is contrary to the manner clearly indicated in the Qur'an: "Do not address God's messenger in the manner you address one another." (24: 63) The Bedouin then made a demand in the same rude way: "Give me some of God's money which you have."

Let us pause for a moment, close our eyes and think what reaction this sequence of provocative steps could generate. A pull of the Prophet's robe that was so strong as to pull him back, tear his robe and leave a clear mark on his neck, followed by a rude address and a ruder demand. We may imagine the storm of anger that any of these actions could have started in one's heart. How about them all? Then consider the wonderful and amazing reaction

of the Prophet. It was a reaction that rose high above the ideal. Can we say that it was the epitome of restraint? No, it was much nobler than that. It was a reaction of Muhammad, the perfect model for all mankind.

He faced the man rather than turning away from him; smiled rather than frowned; and was generous instead of punishing the man. Anas, who witnessed the whole event said: "The Prophet turned to him, smiled and gave instructions that the man should be given money."⁵⁴

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We need to read this *hadith* more than once and reflect on it, contemplating the scene. We will highlight only three points, then let everyone make their own conclusions.

1. The whole thing was very sudden and took the Prophet by surprise as the Bedouin came from behind him. In the natural course of events, it constituted a sequence of provocations that should have caused a furious reaction that might be equally fast and surprising. The Prophet, however, never dealt with matters according to the law of physics that says: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction". He implemented a totally different law, which is the law of sublime ethics, stated in the Qur'anic verse that says: "Most certainly, you have a sublime character." (68: 4)

What is most amazing in the Prophet's reaction is that it was quick and spontaneous, Yet it appears as if it was carefully prepared. He turned to the man showing that he was attentive, smiled to indicate a welcome and gave instructions for him to be given generously. This reaction by the Prophet shows how well ingrained in his nature perfect manners were.

The more we reflect on this lesson by the Prophet the better we are able to overcome the fury of anger and replace it with easy tranquillity. Thus we will be more able to restrain our reactions instead of making our actions subject to our emotions.

⁵⁴ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3149, 5809 & 6088; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1057; Ahmad, *hadith* No. 12090.

2. A man came to the Prophet and requested some advice. The Prophet said to him: “Do not be angry.” The man repeated his request several times, but each time the Prophet repeated the same advice.⁵⁵ On a different occasion the Prophet told his companions that a strong man is not the one who physically overpowers others. “A truly strong person is the one who is able to control himself when angry.”⁵⁶

Here we find perfect harmony between the message the Prophet advocated and the example he set, and between his advice and action. The Prophet said: “I have been sent [as God’s messenger] to bring good manners to perfection.”⁵⁷ Here we see a great example of living up to the ideals one advocates. Every message remains pale and has little effect unless it can be well ingrained in its advocates and clearly reflected by their actions.

3. A question also arises here: what caused this Bedouin to make his demand with such confidence that mounted to rudeness and persistence? Did he not think that he might be punished?

The clear answer is that the man realized that he was protected from punishment by Prophet Muhammad’s sublime manners and character. These were what gave him the assurance and confidence to express himself and demand what he thought to be his right. He could thus express himself fully, fearing no punishment or humiliation. Those who demanded their rights were the people who fulfilled their duties and delivered the message of their Prophet to the world. They were ready to sacrifice their lives for their faith because Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had remoulded their characters, given them great confidence, enabled every one of them to feel his own value and importance as a human being. Thus, everyone was able to demonstrate his or her clear character without reservation.

When fear silences people, their hearts become the home of active grudges.

⁵⁵ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 6116.

⁵⁶ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 6114; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2609.

⁵⁷ Related by al-Bukhari in *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, *hadith* No. 273; Ahmad, *hadith* No. 8595; al-Hakim, *Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 2, p. 670; al-Bayhaqi, *Shu’ab al-Iman*, *hadith* No. 7978.

28. Family's Needs

This is a look into the Prophet's own home; a home that God kept free from all that was loathsome and purified fully. We will make the look through a small window opened to us by our mother, `A'ishah, when a question was repeatedly put to her by a number of people in the generation that followed the Prophet's companions. The question was: "What did the Prophet do when he was with you at home?" This is a question about the private condition and behaviour of a public personality. When the Prophet was out, he attended to the affairs of the community and shouldered its burdens. So, what was he like and what did he do when he went home, closed the door and was alone with his family?

`A'ishah gave the question full importance, opening a window into the Prophet's home so that we could have a full view of the Prophet in his very private life at home, with his family. Hers was a short but full description: "When God's messenger was at home, alone with his family, he was the easiest and most generous of people. He was like any one of you, except that he was always laughing and smiling. He was just an ordinary human being who served his family. He mended his shoes, repaired his robe, milked his sheep and served himself. He did at home what any of you would do at home. When a prayer was due, he would go to the mosque for prayer. I never saw him beating a woman or a servant."⁵⁸

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What a fine description by our mother, `A'ishah, that combines good choice of words with precise expression. Yet we need to reflect on some telling expressions in her presentation.

1. "He was just an ordinary human being." I do not think that `A'ishah intended here to state that the Prophet was a human being,

⁵⁸ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 676 & 6039; Ahmad, *hadith* No. 23093; Ishaq ibn Rahaweih, *Al-Musnad*, *hadith* No. 1550; Ibn Hibban, *Sahih*, *hadith* No. 5676.

not an angel. Rather, she was stressing a more specific aspect, namely the human dimension in family relations. When the Prophet entered his home, he did not behave like a leader or commander. He was just a husband coming home to find comfort with his family. Thus all aspects of the greatness of God's final messenger were focused on the marital relation. He did not show at home the same bearing as he used when he met people. He led a simple and spontaneous family life, so that his wife saw in him only a kind and compassionate husband and life partner. Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the best human being that ever walked on earth, a man who was held in awe by all people that no one could stare at him for long, but at home he was only a husband.

We are often oblivious of this important value. We take into our homes much of how we are treated outside. A man may go to his family wearing a title such as 'His Excellency' or 'His Eminence', instead of putting off these titles at the doorstep and be his ordinary self.

2. "He served his family". I have a pressing question here: Did `A'ishah complain of hard household duties so as to need the Prophet's help? She lived in a one-room house that was no more than 5m.x3.5m. As for household duties, they could pass two complete months without lighting a fire for cooking. What work was there to require much effort, let alone need help? Why, then, was the Prophet serving his family when he was at home?

The Prophet did not do that because of the heavy load of household duties. Those duties were certainly light. He did it to make his wives feel that he shared all their concerns, so that family life reflected this complete sharing. This is a profound meaning that fulfilled the ideal marital state that is described in the Qur'an: "And among His signs is that He creates for you spouses out of your own kind, so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you." (30: 21)

Attending to such simple tasks at home sends a clear message to one's wife, full of love and compassion. It makes her feel so close to her husband and nurture an intimate spiritual relation. When a husband attends to his family's needs, whatever they may be and in any way, he gives a message saying: this is the home we share just as we share our lives together. A perfect marital relation is

the fruit of such fine touches. A husband gains greater esteem and respect by his wife the more humility he shows at home.

3. We look into the Prophet's home through the window opened by his wife and we find it small in size, simple in furniture. Yet the Prophet's manners transformed it into a palace full of joy and pleasure. It echoes laughter and shines with smiles. It flows with happiness and delight, because the Prophet was "like any one of you, except that he was always laughing and smiling."

Affected seriousness and gloomy frowning were alien to the Prophet's home. Pleasant smiles and laughter brought into it a feeling of pleasure and happiness, so that the members of that household felt as if they were living in heaven.

4. This refined aspect of family relation, represented in the husband's willing participation in household duties, gives the family home a relaxed and delightful atmosphere, but it also makes his wife fully appreciative of his help and strengthens love and compassion between the two. What it means in reality is that the husband's presence at home will add to its happiness and he will be missed when he goes out.

People who complain of coldness in their family life should learn this lesson provided by the Prophet. They should learn that such easy touches will bring liveliness into their family life. Attending to the needs of one's wife and family and filling the house with smiles and laughter will bring husband and wife much closer and make them much happier.

5. We note a most remarkable balance in the Prophet's life. The Prophet was always very cheerful and smiling with people, and at home he was always laughing and smiling. With people, he was very generous. Indeed, his companions described him as "more generous than unrestrained wind." At home, he served his family. Without doubt, he was the best of people to his fellow human beings, and he was the best to his family.

Such balance is often missed by people. Some are very pleasant and courteous when they are dealing with people, but they reserve their frowns and gloom to their wives. The wife of a person of this type sees him only complaining or criticizing, although she is the one who has the first claim to kindness and a friendly atmosphere at

home. The Prophet was kind to all people, and his family were the happiest of people because of his kindness.

6. This lesson by the Prophet serves as an open letter to everyone who misunderstands the relation between husband and wife and considers that the man's role is that of a master who should be obeyed at all times.

7. What remains for us to say is that we should pray that God may be pleased with our mother, `A'ishah. In His infinite wisdom, God willed that she should live for nearly half a century after the Prophet had passed away. She remained like an open door for us through which we learnt the Prophet's guidance in his treatment of his family. May God be pleased with her and reward her richly for what she did for the Muslim community in all generations.

29. The Day of the Leather Band

A person coming into the Prophet's mosque would have seen at one side a small room with a low ceiling that accommodated only one person. This was the residence of a black woman who had nowhere else to go. The woman went frequently to the Prophet's home where she talked with `A'ishah, the Prophet's wife, who always welcomed her. Just before she left, she would always say a line of poetry, repeating it every time. It said: "The day of the leather band witnessed an amazing act of God who saved me from the land of idolatry."

`A'ishah wondered at the woman repeating this line of poetry every time. What was that amazing act that this woman never omitted to mention? One day, she asked her: "Why do you say this every time you sit with me?" The woman told her a most amazing story.

The black woman was a slave belonging to some family in Makkah, and they set her free. However, because she had nowhere to go and no family to join, she stayed with that family, like many other freed slaves. One day, a young woman of that family, who was preparing for her wedding night, went out to the bathing place to take a bath. She had a red band made of leather as one of her ornaments. As she was about to enter the bathing place, she put her band outside with her other stuff. A kite snatched it as it thought it was a piece of meat. When the woman came out of her bath, she could not find her red band. She complained to her family, and the family accused the black woman of stealing it. They tortured her to confess her guilt but she denied all knowledge of what happened to the band. They exposed her to personal search, took off her clothes and even looked into her genital organ. She felt very humiliated and oppressed. She could not defend herself, as she had neither family nor relatives to speak for her.

In her distress and helplessness, the woman appealed to God, her Creator, and forgot about the idols and statues worshipped by her people. In her great distress, her appeal was most earnest. She prayed that God would show the people that she was innocent. Among God's attributes is that He "responds to the one in distress

when he calls out to Him, and removes the ill.” The response to her prayer was faster and greater than she had hoped. The family were still around her levelling their accusations and demanding confession when they saw the kite coming towards them, flying near their heads and dropping the red band. They took it, realizing that the woman was innocent. She was able to insist most emphatically on her innocence. Hence, she left them and travelled to Madinah to join the Prophet.

The Prophet welcomed her and gave her this place in his mosque to sleep in, and she was always welcomed in his home. She felt at ease as she embraced Islam, and she regained her dignity as she felt herself one of the community of brotherhood that included all Muslims.

I feel that she was the woman who voluntarily undertook the task of cleaning the mosque. She picked up whatever rubbish was left in it. One day, the Prophet realized that she was not to be seen. He enquired about her and he was informed that she had died. He said: “Why have you not informed me?” They said: “Messenger of God, she died at night and we did not wish to wake you up. We attended to her burial.” The Prophet asked to be shown her grave and he went there and prayed for her. He then said: “These graves are all darkness, but God gives their dwellers light When I pray for them.”⁵⁹

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1. We need to reflect on several points in this story. The first is that the trial to which the black woman was exposed made her regain the sound nature that God has given mankind. She had endured much distress and injustice, as she was falsely accused of stealing. She could find no way to prove her innocence and no one to support her in her distress. She realized that the deities her people worshipped could avail her nothing. Therefore, she presented her complaint to the Creator, appealing for His support.

⁵⁹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 439, 458, 1337 & 3835; Muslim, *hadith* No. 956; Ahmad, *hadith* No. 8634 & 9037.

His response was immediate and she saw with her own eyes how her innocence was proven in full clarity, with the kite flying close to her people's heads before throwing the leather band among them. They were amazed at what happened and let her leave. She immigrated to where God alone was worshipped, for she realized that only He responds to appeals and removes distress.

2. This woman was ecstatic as she always remembered how God bestowed His grace on her. When she immigrated to join the Prophet, she fully enjoyed the happiness generated by faith, after she had lived in the darkness of error. She was treated with respect after she had been humiliated. In her past, she was falsely accused; but among the Muslim community she lived as one of a great brotherhood, having her full rights. She realized that the brotherhood of believers is real, as they all supported one another and took care of one another. Perhaps the ultimate of her happy feelings was when she found herself in the best of homes; the home God purified of all evil; the home of Prophet Muhammad where she frequently went to find pleasant company and take part in a relaxed conversation. It is not surprising, therefore, that she compared her two situations and felt God's grace. She expressed her feelings in this line of poetry: "The day of the leather band witnessed an amazing act of God who saved me from the land of idolatry." Indeed God saved her from a situation of humiliation and ill-treatment to make her a companion of the Prophet, residing in his mosque and socializing with his family.

3. We note that the Prophet's home was a refuge for Muslims, particularly those of them who were poor or in distress. His small compartment welcomed such vulnerable people, as we see this black woman frequently visiting `A'ishah. She did not go there for a meal, but to chat and socialize. In the Prophet's home she found a welcome that removed her feelings of being a stranger in Madinah. `A'ishah treated this woman according to the values taught by the Prophet who gave a warm welcome to all people. Hence, this woman, who was a stranger, found her place in this blessed house and enjoyed her share of the Prophet's hospitality.

4. When the woman immigrated and joined the Prophet, living in his mosque, she did not make herself a burden to the Muslim community. She found a role for herself so as to be of service to the

community. Her background helped her find this role and she undertook the cleaning of the Prophet's mosque. Thus, she had a contribution to make and her contribution was felt by all those who came to the mosque and found it clean as it should be.

5. The Prophet's care was extended to all people. Even the most vulnerable and weakest of people found that they had their place with him and in his heart. He neglected no one. On the contrary, he extended a hand of help to everyone. In this instance, we see him enquiring about a black woman whom he missed. He remonstrated with his companions for their failure to inform him of her death. He then went to her grave and offered the prayer for the deceased. He also prayed to God to enlighten the graves for their dwellers. All this for a stranger woman who had passed away. She could no longer offer anything, and she had no relatives to console. It was his refined character and sublime ethics that prompted him to extend care to her when she was alive and to visit her grave after her death. May God be pleased with His messenger's servant, and may He bestow His peace and blessings on Prophet Muhammad who fulfilled his message, bringing fine manners to perfection.

30. The Two Closest Companions

They were the most notable figures in the Quraysh and among the very early Muslims. Both were very close to the Prophet, and they hardly ever left him or went their separate ways. The Prophet often said: “I went with Abu Bakr and `Umar; I came back with Abu Bakr and `Umar; or, when I left, Abu Bakr and `Umar were with me.”⁶⁰

Yet despite this close friendship, a very strange incident took place between them which profoundly affected the Prophet. One day they had an argument and it was somewhat heated. Abu Bakr was rather quick tempered, and he might have said something that angered `Umar. `Umar moved away, feeling angry. Abu Bakr was sorry that the situation should develop in this way, and he followed `Umar begging his pardon. However, `Umar was very angry and did not reply to Abu Bakr’s request. He continued until he reached his home, went in and closed his door. We see that `Umar’s anger was intense. However, Abu Bakr regretted what happened even more. He, therefore, went straight to the Prophet, feeling very agitated. The Prophet’s companions who were with the Prophet were surprised to see Abu Bakr coming in, holding the edge of his robe, leaving his knees exposed. When the Prophet saw him coming in, he said to those attending him: “Your friend has something worrying him. Abu Bakr sat down and said: “Messenger of God, I had some argument with `Umar and I said something in my anger. I then regretted what I said and requested him to forgive me but he refused. I went after him until he entered his home. I then came to you, messenger of God.” The Prophet said: “May God forgive you, Abu Bakr.” He repeated this three times.

`Umar soon cooled down, because he loved Abu Bakr dearly, and knew his good standing in the service of the Islamic cause. He was fully aware of the fact that Abu Bakr was one of the very first people to believe in Islam. Therefore, `Umar regretted that he did not answer Abu Bakr when the latter begged his pardon. He therefore went out and aimed first to Abu Bakr’s home. He was

⁶⁰ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3685; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2389.

told that Abu Bakr was not in, and that perhaps he might have gone to see the Prophet. `Umar went to the Prophet at the mosque hoping to find Abu Bakr there. As `Umar sat down, the Prophet's face changed, as the Prophet was unhappy with `Umar for not accepting Abu Bakr's apology. All those who were present realized that the Prophet was really angry. Abu Bakr also realized that and feared that the Prophet might say something that would displease `Umar. He, therefore, drew closer to the Prophet, sat on his knees and said: "Messenger of God, by God I was in the wrong." He repeated this twice. The Prophet said: "O people, God sent me as His messenger to you. I said to you that God sent me to you, and you said that I was a liar but Abu Bakr said that I said the truth. He helped me with his energy and his property. Will you leave my companion alone?" He repeated the question three times.

Never did anyone upset Abu Bakr after that day, as the Prophet's companions recognized how highly the Prophet valued his company and appreciated his efforts. May God be pleased with all the Prophet's companions.⁶¹

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Several points need to be considered here. The first is that the community of the Prophet's companions was the most perfect morally, as it was moulded by God's messenger who is described in the Qur'an as having had a sublime character. His companions aspired to the highest standards through being in the Prophet's company. Yet they were humans and experienced normal feelings. If it was possible that a community could be free of such ill-feelings, the community the Prophet moulded would have been the one. If any people could have been excepted from having such feelings, Abu Bakr and `Umar would have been the ones. We, therefore, should have a realistic view of ourselves and our community. We must not be too hard on ourselves, trying to be too idealistic, particularly if our feelings get the better of us sometimes.

⁶¹ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3661 & 4640. Al-Tabarani, *Al-Mu`jam al-Kabir*, *hadith* No. 13383; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 7, p. 25.

“The way man is created makes him lose control at times.”⁶² The important thing is to bring our feelings back in check if we have given way. Moreover, we must try to stop their ill effects on others and on ourselves. This is achieved through cooling down quickly, taking a calmer view and doing what is necessary to bring things back under control. This is much better than persisting with anger.

Secondly, we note how quickly both Abu Bakr and `Umar cooled down and how keen they both were to remove the ill effects of what they did. Abu Bakr said something that angered `Umar, but he soon apologized and begged his pardon. Similarly, when `Umar calmed down, he went out seeking Abu Bakr, calling at his home and then going to where he thought he might find him.

We also note how sensitive Abu Bakr was. He went quickly to the Prophet, holding his robe and looking agitated. All this was because `Umar did not accept his apology. We feel that he went to the Prophet seeking his help so that the Prophet would reconcile him with `Umar. Hence, when he saw that the Prophet was angry he feared that he might say something that would upset `Umar even more. He feared that `Umar would be in a difficult situation as a result. Hence, he appealed to the Prophet stating that he was the one more in the wrong. This indicates that at that moment, he had no ill feeling towards `Umar. Grudges did not linger long in those pure hearts of the Prophet's companions. They were just like the Qur'an describes: “If those who are God-fearing experience a tempting thought from Satan, they bethink themselves [of God]; and they begin to see things clearly.” (7: 201)

Thirdly, in the heat of the moment, such attitudes have their effect, but it is a transitory one. It is the brotherhood that Islam establishes which remains firm and solid. We note that Abu Bakr was at first very angry with `Umar, and then `Umar did not accept his apology. Yet when Abu Bakr was on his deathbed, he appointed `Umar to succeed him as ruler of the Muslim state, because he recognized that he was the most pious, caring and totally qualified for the role.

On the other hand, `Umar recognized Abu Bakr's great qualities and he loved him dearly. He said: “I would rather have my

⁶² Related by Muslim, *hadith* No. 2611.

head chopped off than become a leader of a community that includes Abu Bakr.”⁶³

Finally, we note the splendid acknowledgement of Abu Bakr’s role by God’s messenger. He reminds his companions of the leading role Abu Bakr played, and how he was always ready to sacrifice his all for the message of Islam. Hence, the Prophet was angry and his anger showed in his face. He then appealed to his followers to recognize Abu Bakr’s status: “Will you leave my companion alone?” That was a gesture of appreciation of Abu Bakr’s efforts. He was ahead of all others. No one could compete with Abu Bakr or achieve his status. Hence, the Muslim community should appreciate his role. Moreover, the Prophet’s attitude indicates that people of outstanding service should be treated in a way that recognizes their service. Their qualities and status should never be ignored.

⁶³ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 6830; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1691.

31. Abu Turab

One day, the Prophet went to visit his daughter Fatimah, as he frequently did. It was late in the morning when men in Arabia were normally at home for their midday nap. However, the Prophet did not find `Ali at home. So he asked his daughter: "Where is your cousin?" It seems that the Prophet sensed that something might have happened between `Ali and his wife and that he left home as a result. Hence, the Prophet wanted to soften his daughter's heart towards her husband, and mentioned the fact that they were cousins.

Fatimah said: "We had an argument and he was upset. He left without having his nap here." The Prophet said to someone who was with him: "Look for him and let me know." The man found `Ali sleeping next to the wall of the mosque. He came back and said: "Messenger of God, he is sleeping in the mosque." The Prophet went to the mosque and found `Ali asleep, and his upper garment had fallen off his shoulders. Some dust was on his body. The Prophet wiped the dust off `Ali's body with his hand and said jokingly: "Rise, Abu Turab! Rise, Abu Turab."⁶⁴

* * *

There are several points to note in this scene.

1. The first is the fact that the Prophet used to visit his daughter in her family home after her marriage. As a father, he was the one to be visited, but he did not hold on to his right, demanding it. He exchanged visits with her at all times, maintaining a close relation between parent and daughter. This was the relation God's messenger was keen to maintain between himself and his daughter who was the First Lady of mankind.

⁶⁴ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 441, 3703 & 6204; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2409. *Turab* means 'dust' and *Abu* means 'father of'. It was customary for the Arabs when something looked odd for a person to call that person as father of that odd thing.

2. We note that Fatimah explained the situation in a very polite way, speaking in general terms without adding any details: “We had an argument and... he left.” She did not try to put the blame on her husband, but kept it as something between them. Do we wonder at her refined manners? We must not forget that she was brought up in the Prophet’s home, where God’s revelations were recited. When a woman’s tongue opens a window into her home, she loses her privacy and aggravates her problems. She cannot control the consequences of people’s interfering into her family affairs, making a great issue of a small problem.

3. The Prophet accepted his daughter’s general answer and did not question her about details. He did not ask her about the nature of their argument, or the details of what they said. He overlooked all that and went ahead to find her husband who left home in anger. This is a very wise way of dealing with such transitory marital problems. When the elders interfere in such problems, they often aggravate them, while leaving them to take their natural course keeps them small.

4. The Prophet dealt with his son-in-law with all the tenderness of a parent. He wanted him to feel that he was a father for both of them. It was the Prophet who went to see `Ali where he was sleeping; and it was the Prophet who wiped the dust off his body with his own hand. He sat close to him and spoke to him in a relaxed way, saying: “Rise, Abu Turab.” Such a relaxed address assured `Ali that the Prophet did not take issue with him. He was only extending his fatherly tenderness to his cousin and son-in-law.

How refined the Prophet’s manners were. He went to his son-in-law to appease him; he wiped the dust off his body to reassure him; he gave him a name that suited his appearance at that moment; and he did not say a word about his quarrel with his daughter, although she was the dearest person to the Prophet.

5. `Ali was very wise in dealing with a marital problem that might cause anger. His going out of the house to have his nap in the mosque stopped the argument with his wife. It gave them both a chance to calm down and overcome their anger. Thus, life went back to normal and the compassion between husband and wife was resumed. A short absence in such a situation could be very effective in restoring normal relations and stopping anger.

6. The Prophet's attitude in this case was treasured by `Ali and he remembered it with pleasure. Abu Turab was his nickname that he loved most and he loved to be called by it, because the Prophet addressed him by this name on this occasion.

32. I Love Him

It was about noon when it was burning hot. Nobody left home at this time, but the Prophet went out that day, accompanied by Abu Hurayrah. Abu Hurayrah did not know where the Prophet was heading and he did not wish to ask him. The Prophet passed by the marketplace and walked until he reached the home of his daughter, Fatimah. He stopped at the door and did not enter. He called out: "Where is the little one? Where is the little one?"

Fatimah heard her father, and her son, al-Hasan also recognized his grandfather's voice. He started to walk towards the door, but his mother stopped him so that she would make him presentable. She washed his face and put around his neck a necklace of carnation. Young boys used to wear such necklaces. She then let him go. The boy ran to meet his grandfather. When the Prophet saw him coming, he sat on the ground and opened his arms wide. Al-Hasan also opened his arms as he ran and then threw himself over the Prophet's chest which he knew was full of compassion. The two embraced long, and the Prophet smelled his grandson and kissed him. He then said: "My Lord, I love him; so please love him and love whoever loves him."

Abu Hurayrah who witnessed the scene warmed to this scene of tenderness and used to say: "No one was dearer to me ever since than al-Hasan ibn `Ali, because of what the Prophet said then."⁶⁵

* * *

Several points are worth noting in this scene:

1. The Prophet went out at a time when people stayed at home because of the heat in the middle of the day. This suggests that he had something important which he wanted to do. This was visiting his grandson, hugging and kissing him and praying for him. The Prophet attended fully to his family needs. He provided the best example to follow, giving everyone their rights. Needless to say, the

⁶⁵ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2122; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2421.

first claims were those of his own children and grandchildren. Hence, his visits to his daughters were not left to the odd spare hour. He gave them their full share of his time, even if this meant that he would leave home in the middle of the day in a city known for its very hot weather.

2. This scene overflows with emotion. We see the Prophet pouring out his love of his grandson in a greatly natural scene. The child finds a loving welcome, with his grandfather opening his arms to receive him; then he hugs, kisses and smells him before he says a declaration of pure love: "My Lord, I love him." This is followed with a prayer that this love is extended in God's Supreme Society and among mankind: "Please love him and love whoever loves him."

It is a case of emotional saturation which young children need at all times. When it is granted and assured, the child grows up with balanced emotions. The child will be the recipient and giver of love, and will have the right attitude towards the community.

On the other hand, when parents take the opposite attitude, falling short of answering their children's emotional needs, they leave a barren area in their children's souls which may open the way for psychological problems.

3. The Prophet stood near Fatimah's door but did not enter. He called for what he wanted, and that was to see his grandson. This must have been very gratifying to Fatimah who saw how dear her son was to her father.

Kindness to children is kindness to their parents and an easy way to please the parents. We may imagine how pleased Fatimah was with this very close relation between her son and her father. She must have been elated as she heard her father pouring out his love of her son. Undoubtedly, the Prophet's love of his grandchildren was a branch of his love of his children.

4. The fact that the child ran towards his grandfather and opened his arms is a clear pointer to a long standing close relation between them. Al-Hasan must have received much of his grandfather's care and love in different ways. The Prophet often hugged and smelled him, declaring: "I love him." One day, he was giving a speech before the Friday prayer when he saw al-Hasan and

his brother al-Husayn coming. He stopped his speech, stepped down to meet them and placed them next to him. He quoted the Qur'anic verse that says: "Your wealth and children are only a trial and a temptation." (64: 15) He added: "I saw them and I could not wait." He then continued his speech.⁶⁶

One day the Prophet was leading the congregational prayer and he stayed exceptionally long in his prostration. After the prayer, he was asked about it. He said: "My son mounted on my back and I did not want to rush him."⁶⁷

The Prophet's emotion towards his grandchildren was a continuous phenomenon. It was by no means an occasional gesture. Hence, it resulted in this mutual longing to meet.

5. The Prophet treated his daughter's children with such an outpour of emotion and clear love. He referred to them as his own children and declared this in public. He said in reference to al-Hasan and al-Husayn: "These are my sons and my daughter's sons."⁶⁸ He also said about al-Hasan: "This son of mine is a noble one."⁶⁹ This the Prophet said in Arabia where the Arabs used to look down on their daughters and treated their children as strangers. A poet expressed this, saying:

Our sons are those begotten by our sons. Out daughters'
sons are the children of men who are strangers.

Thus the Prophet set things right, putting people back on the track of sound human nature and making clear that fair treatment should be extended to all.

6. The Prophet's love of his grandchildren and his prayer for them had a clear impact on the life of his companions who responded to his clear emotions and loved those he loved. Having heard the Prophet say what he said to al-Hasan, Abu Hurayrah

⁶⁶ Related by Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 1109; al-Tirmidhi, *hadith* No. 3774; Ibn Hibban, *hadith* No. 6039.

⁶⁷ Related by al-Nassa'i, *hadith* No. 1411; al-Hakim, *hadith* No. 4775.

⁶⁸ Related by al-Tirmidhi, *hadith* No. 3769.

⁶⁹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3629.

makes clear that he loved no one better than al-Hasan. Whenever he saw him, Abu Hurayrah's eyes were tearful.

One day when Abu Bakr was the Caliph, after the Prophet had passed away, Abu Bakr came out of the mosque and he saw al-Hasan playing with other boys. Abu Bakr took al-Hasan, carried him on his shoulder and chanted: "By my father, he looks like the Prophet, not like `Ali." `Ali was walking by Abu Bakr's side and smiling. He was very pleased with what Abu Bakr did and said.

Our Lord, we declare that we love al-Hasan and al-Husayn, Your messenger's grandchildren. We pray that through this love You will grant us Your love and the love of Your messenger. We pray that You keep us on the same way they went and to put us with them on the Day of Judgement.

33. Umamah

The Prophet's companions were gathered in the mosque, awaiting the Prophet to come out of his home and lead the midday prayer. Bilal, who was in charge of calling the prayer, had called him and said that the congregation was ready. The Prophet came out, but what surprised his companions was that he was carrying on his shoulder his granddaughter, Umamah, whose mother was Zaynab, the Prophet's eldest daughter. The prayer was called and the congregation stood in straight rows. The Prophet was in his position where he led the prayer and the young girl was still in her comfortable position on his shoulder. When he wanted to bow, as required in prayer, he took her gently and placed her on the floor. He bowed and prostrated himself. When he finished his prostration and stood up, he took the child and carried her again. He completed his prayer in the same fashion: he carried her when he stood up and placed her on the floor when he bowed and prostrated himself.⁷⁰

* * *

1. The scene shows how simple and spontaneous the Prophet's life was. He comes out for the obligatory prayer, with a large congregation awaiting him, carrying a little girl, his granddaughter. This is totally different from the serious atmosphere people normally affect on formal occasions. It was a natural gesture that reflected a spontaneous response to natural human feelings. That the Prophet acted in this simple and natural way did not detract from the feeling of awe he naturally inspired in all who saw him. It shows that the Prophet was simply great and greatly simple in his attitude to all life situations, and he was clearly human. The Qur'an gives him this instruction: "Say: Limitless in His glory is my Lord. Surely I am only a man and a messenger." (17: 93)

2. The very sight of the little girl on the Prophet's shoulder, with her little hands around his head, suggests that this was simply

⁷⁰ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 516 & 5996; Muslim, *hadith* No. 543. Al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 5, p. 33. Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 1, p. 591 & vol. 10, p. 429.

carrying on from what was taking place at home before the Prophet came out for the prayer. He must have been playing with the child and she was enjoying herself with him. When he wanted to come out for the prayer, she must have clung to him. She did not want him to leave her and he did not wish to let her cry if he went out. Therefore, he took her out with him so that the people would see him on an occasion overflowing with parental emotions.

3. We need to put this scene against its historical and social background. Those people who were gathered for the prayer were until a few years earlier a community that despised girls and celebrated the birth of a son. God describes the Arabs in their pre-Islamic days as follows: "And when any of them is given the happy news of the birth of a girl, his face darkens and he is filled with gloom. He tries to avoid all people on account of the [allegedly] bad news he has received, [debating within himself:] shall he keep the child despite the shame he feels, or shall he bury it in the dust? Evil indeed is their judgement." (16: 58-59) Here they are witnessing the Prophet bringing with him a little girl, the daughter of his daughter, and carry her on his shoulder as he led the prayer. This was a great lesson to everyone in this congregation, telling them that girls were a source of pleasure and happiness. Great indeed is the difference between a person who avoids people when he is told of the birth of a daughter and the one who takes his granddaughter out before the great congregation gathered for an obligatory prayer.

4. The Prophet's overflowing tenderness towards his granddaughter adds a kindness towards her mother, Zaynab. She must have been overjoyed to see her father, God's messenger, together with her daughter. Let us imagine that someone asked her where her daughter was: what would be her feelings as she would answer: "God's messenger has taken her out with him to the prayer." Kindness to daughters goes beyond their circle so as to include kindness to their children.

5. We need to remember that the man who carried his granddaughter during his prayer, placing her on the floor when he prostrated himself and carrying her again when he rose up, is the same one who said: "My happiest moment is when I am in

prayer.”⁷¹ He was the one who attended fully, with all his thought, to his prayer and who considered the time of prayer the most sacred and most important. Nevertheless, he did not feel that carrying his granddaughter during an obligatory prayer detracted from the importance of prayer or the attention to this task. We wonder with Imam al-Dhahabi what some aspirants to scholarship would say when they hear this.

It is not wrong to say that in this instance the Prophet fulfilled two aspects of worship at the same time: his prayer offered to God and his kindness to his daughter and granddaughter. The two were combined in one action.

⁷¹ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 3940; al-Nassa'i, *hadith* No. 3939; al-Hakim, *hadith* No. 2676.

34. Education at the Marketplace

One day the Prophet was visiting some villages around Madinah. As he came back, he went into the marketplace. People were all around him. He passed by a dead billy goat and he noticed that it had very small ears, which was considered a defect that reduced the animal's value when alive. The Prophet held it by its ear and raised it before the people. He said: "Who buys this for one dirham?"⁷²

To those present the question sounded very strange: the dead animal was of no value, but the Prophet was asking if anyone would buy it. Anyway, the question roused their attention and they answered: "We would not take it for anything. What are we to do with it?" The Prophet again asked them: "Would you like to have it?" They said: "No." Yet the Prophet repeated the question for the third time. They were amazed at him repeating this question. They said: "No way. Had it been alive, it would have been of little value because of the defect in his face. As it is dead, it is worth nothing."

Yet the Prophet's companions were eager to know what was behind the Prophet's repeated question. Hence, he gave them a statement of fact which he wanted to be ingrained in their minds and hearts. He said: "By God, this whole world is worth less in God's sight than this dead goat to you."⁷³

* * *

Several points are to be noted in this *hadith*.

1. The first thing to note is that the Prophet was coming back from a visit to some villages around Madinah. This is an activity often mentioned in *hadiths*. He is said to have paid a social visit to the Harithah clan late in the afternoon; visited the Salamah clan

⁷² A dirham was the unit of the silver currency at the time.

⁷³ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 14402; al-Bukhari in *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, *hadith* No. 962; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2956; Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 186.

when they slaughtered a camel;⁷⁴ was once late for the prayer because he went to the clan of `Amr ibn `Awf to make peace between some parties among them;⁷⁵ and visited someone who was ill in another clan.

Such reports tell us that the Prophet interacted fully with his companions. He lived among them, visited their places and looked after them. He did not isolate himself from them. His practice increased his influence and made people eager to emulate him and follow his example. Advocates of Islam who were very influential followed the Prophet's guidance in being present among their people and interacting with them in the proper way. Among such influential advocates in our present times were Hasan al-Banna, Abd al-Hameed ibn Badees and Abd al-Azeez ibn Baz [may God bestow His mercy on them all].

2. We note with admiration the Prophet's highly effective method of education. He grouped together several aspects: he used the dead goat as an aide to highlight the notion of worthlessness; then put the question to arouse interest; then made the comparison to illustrate the intended meaning; and used dialogue so that his audience would come together to the final conclusion. All this took place in a few moments, which also enhanced the effect of what he said. This whole scene would remain present in the minds of those who witnessed it and would be transmitted far and wide. May God shower His blessings on Muhammad, the best teacher of all that is best.

3. The Prophet's choice of this issue of the world's worthlessness in God's sight to admonish people in the marketplace, in this particularly fine manner, is clearly significant. It is in the market that people pursue their worldly needs, and in the market they may be so busy that they may forget about their future life. In the market environment a person may be strongly tempted to resort to some forbidden practices, such as fraud, telling lies, swearing to the good quality of his merchandise, or they may indulge in argument and vain talk. The best thing that stops people from yielding to such temptation is to imagine the life to come in front of their eyes, give worldly gains their correct value, compare

⁷⁴ Related by Muslim, *hadith* No. 624.

⁷⁵ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 685; Muslim, *hadith* No. 421.

the fleeting enjoyments of this world with the everlasting reward God gives people, remember that we all shall return to Him and also remember how He values this world. The Prophet pointed to all this in his admonition.

4. Education was the ever present element in the Prophet's life. All areas of life were to him educational classes, because his faith is for life. The Qur'an says: "Believers, respond to the call of God and the messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life." (8: 24) He did not limit education to an admonition given from the pulpit or inside the mosque. His education was given in the marketplace, by the side of the road, over a dinner table, by the side of the bed of a sick person, and even a few moments before death occurred. His was a continuous education that embraced all life situations.

5. This *hadith* refers to the worthlessness of this life in comparison with the life to come. Compared to the latter, this present life is not longer than a flash of light or a blink of an eye. On the Day of Judgement, people will be asked how long they lived in this world. Their immediate answer will be: "one day". Then they think that their life did not take a full day, and so they say: "Or perhaps less than a day." The happiness or the misery of this present life cannot be measured against those of the hereafter. The happiest person ever may be placed in hell for a moment and taken out. He will then say: "I never experienced any sort of happiness." The most miserable person ever may be placed in heaven for a moment and he will then say: "I never experienced any misery at all."⁷⁶ How can this present life, short as it is, be compared to the everlasting life to come?

This broad view of life makes all human dealings, in all areas, more disciplined and more in line with its true principles. Thus, the fleeting affairs of life are given their right measure.

This does not mean that life is ignored; rather, it is taken in a new light that opens up a new perspective. As the Prophet explained to his companions the worthlessness of this life in God's sight, he did not question their presence in the market, buying and selling, and earning their living. All these are worthy activities, but

⁷⁶ Related by Muslim, *hadith* No. 2807.

they become clearer and purer when exercised with a clear view of life in both its stages, the present and the future.

35. Amazing Feelings

Barirah, a companion of the Prophet, was a slave woman owned by a family from the Ansar. She agreed with them a deal to buy her freedom for nine ounces of silver, to be paid by instalments, an ounce every year. When she had paid four ounces, she went to `A'ishah, the Prophet's wife, seeking her help in settling her outstanding instalments. `A'ishah paid the five ounces straightaway and set Barirah free.

When she regained her freedom and became her own mistress, she reviewed her marital relation, as her husband, Mughith, remained a slave. As a free woman, she was able to retain or terminate her marriage. Her choice was to terminate it, because she did not love her husband. He, on the other hand, loved her dearly. When he realized her intention, he tried hard to persuade her to retain their marriage. He followed her in the streets of Madinah, imploring her not to terminate their marriage, but she insisted, telling him that she did not wish to remain married to him. He was in tears. The Prophet saw them as he passed by them with his uncle, al-`Abbas. He said: “`Abbas, do you not wonder how passionately Mughith loves Barirah and how strongly she dislikes him?”

Mughith appealed to the Prophet to speak to her. The Prophet did that suggesting to her to go back to him as he was her children's father. She said: “Messenger of God, are you giving me an order? Is this a duty I am bound to do?” The Prophet said: “No, I am only trying to help.” She said: “I do not want him. Were he to give me such and such, I would not take him.”

She acted on her decision, leaving her husband, despite the fact that the Prophet spoke to her and despite her husband's strong love and eagerness to remain married to her.⁷⁷

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We need to reflect on several points in this story:

⁷⁷ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 5280-5283.

1. The Prophet shows clear understanding of emotions and feelings. He neither blamed nor objected to either party. He only wondered at Mughith's strong love of his wife and Barirah's strong dislike of her husband. He expresses this in his conversation with his uncle, wondering at such opposite feelings. In normal situations love is exchanged between the two parties, but in this case, a strong love is met by strong dislike.

Such understanding of hearts and the strength of feelings, and such a realistic approach to emotions are aspects of Islam's compatibility with human nature. It is part of the Prophet's guidance that happy occasions should be celebrated, grief should be expressed, and emotions accommodated. This means that emotions need not be suppressed or outlawed; rather, they are declared but kept under control and within the limits of Islamic morality. Nothing can be clearer of the recognition of the loving emotion than the Prophet's intervention on behalf of the loving husband to persuade his deserting wife to remain with him.

2. "Do you not wonder how passionately Mughith loves Barirah and how strongly she dislikes him?" This is a case that shows that the society established by the Prophet in Madinah was a society of love. People did not find love strange. What they found really strange was that love was met by strong dislike.

3. In his interpretation of this *hadith*, al-'Ayni says in *Umdat al-Qari*: "It is clearly understood that there is no objection to any Muslim man who loves a Muslim woman, whether his love is concealed or made apparent. There is nothing sinful in that, even if the passion is very strong, as long as he does not resort to anything forbidden or commit a sin."

4. We also note the breadth of the care the Prophet took of people and their affairs. He undertakes to speak concerning the marriage of a slave man with a woman who has just obtained her freedom. His care was extended to them all and they realized that. Even a slave considers that he has the right to request the Prophet to speak on his behalf and the Prophet does as requested and speaks for him. When we consider that the Prophet took care of even such matters of feeling and emotion, how caring was he of matters that were much more serious or affecting the whole community?

5. We also note that Barirah felt her independence and acted on it, taking a decision on her future. She felt her new empowerment. She discussed the matter with the Prophet and made her decision clear. When the Prophet spoke to her, she wanted first to establish whether he was giving her an order and she had to obey. When she realized that it was not so, and that he was only trying to bring about peace and reconciliation between them, she declared her decision, rejecting a relationship with a husband she did not love, even though the one interceding between them was none other than God's messenger. Is it not amazing that a woman who had just become free, after having been a slave, should be able to exercise her full rights and declare her decision before God's messenger? Yet our amazement disappears that she served in the Prophet's home and as such she was a product of the environment established by the Prophet. That helped her to have a confident personality: she felt her humanity, fulfilled her duty and knew her rights.

6. The Prophet was not upset that Barirah did not accept his intervention. She did not sink in his estimation as a result. Nor did she feel that her rejection would affect her position with him or his with her. We should learn from this that if we intercede with someone for a certain purpose, we should accept that person's decision, whether he accepts our intercession or rejects it.

36. Such a Young Man

He was still in his teens and like all people, he held the Prophet in awe. Yet neither consideration of his youth nor the Prophet's standing deterred him from going to him to request a way out of what he was feeling. His sexual urge was troubling him. Therefore, he went to the Prophet, stood facing him when many of his companions were sitting around. He said: "Messenger of God, permit me to commit adultery." His words sounded like a bombshell. Everyone looked stunned and people shouted at him in rebuke. They thought: how could God's messenger be requested to permit adultery when the commandment prohibiting it was revealed to him? How could the one whose mission was to eradicate all abominable practices permit one of the most abominable?

The Prophet, however, told his companions to leave the young man alone, and turned to him, asking him to come closer. He came forward and sat down facing the Prophet. The Prophet took an attitude that combined parental care and teachers' insight with a conclusive argument. He asked the young man: "Would you like that someone should do this with your mother?" The young man said: "No, by God, messenger of God, may I sacrifice my life for you." The Prophet said: "Likewise, people do not like this for their mothers. Would you like that someone should do this with your daughter?" The young man repeated his answer. The Prophet again said: "And other people do not like it for their daughters. Would you like that someone should do it with your parental aunt?" The man repeated his first answer. The Prophet repeated the same reply before asking the same question concerning maternal aunts. Once more the man repeated his answer. The Prophet then said: "Other people do not like it for their maternal aunts." He then added his advice: "Hate what God hates. Wish for people what you wish for yourself and hate for them what you hate for yourself." The young man realized that what he had contemplated was a sin that tainted one's heart. He therefore said: "Messenger of God, pray for me that God may purify my heart." The Prophet placed his hand on the young man's chest and said this prayer: "My Lord, forgive him his sin, purify his heart and make him able to maintain his chastity."

The young man left, and people watched him. They said later: this young man never looked at anything sinful ever since.⁷⁸

* * *

1. The first thing to note in this *hadith* is that the young man went straight to the Prophet, without hesitation, to speak openly of what he felt he needed, even though the whole point is both private and sensitive. This could not have happened without the Prophet establishing a unique sort of relationship between him and his companions. It was a relationship that removed all barriers of age, class, race and geographical areas. They all felt close to him. As noted in Chapter 23, a young girl is left to touch the seal of prophethood between his shoulders. A young woman would stop him and take him by the hand wherever she wanted. A Bedouin would stand before him and say that he would put to him some hard questions, as we will discuss in Chapter 40. This young man was not deterred by the Prophet's position, the awe he inspired in all people or the age gap between them. He put to him his problem with all clarity, feeling absolutely safe. That the Prophet was able to look after the entire community, making all section of his society attracted to him, speaks volumes for the Prophet's refined manners. It behoves everyone who undertakes the task of advocacy of Islam to follow the Prophet's example.

2. We are especially impressed by the dialogue the Prophet conducted and how he invited the young man to think hard. The Prophet wanted him to be convinced and to shoulder his responsibility as a believer. All believers have to do what God bids them and to refrain from what He forbids them. It was easy for the Prophet to say to this young man: "I cannot find any concession for you." We feel that had the Prophet said this, the young man would have accepted it and resigned himself to it. The Prophet, however, wanted to draw his attention to other aspects of the issue which he had not considered. These were enough to show him that adultery was not only sinful, but also abominable and harmful. He thus

⁷⁸ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 22211; al-Tabarani, *Al-Mu`jam al-Kabir*, vol. 8, p. 162; al-Bayhaqi, *Al-Sunan al-Kubra*, vol. 9, p. 45 and *Shu`ab al-Iman*, *hadith* No. 5032.

arrived at a rational conviction in addition to full acceptance of the Islamic ruling. An advocate of Islam has the responsibility to convince people of what he is advocating. Had anyone been exempt from this task, the exemption would have been given to the Prophet (peace be upon him). Nevertheless, his guidance and practice show that he addressed people's minds and encouraged them to think and contemplate so as to arrive at the right convictions. By doing so, he rid humanity of its intellectual shackles and led it to its maturity. May God bestow His mercy on Abbas al-Aqqad for stating the maxim: "Rational thinking is an Islamic obligation."

3. We note that the Prophet presented his very convincing argument in an impressive context of emotion and feeling. As a result, the young man felt that the Prophet made a special address to him, like a father who gives advice wrapped with love and compassion. This was first clearly apparent when the Prophet told his companions not to rebuke the young man, then in asking him to come closer which enabled the young man to sit close to him. The proximity adds a warm feeling. Finally, the Prophet immediately responded to the young man's request to pray for him, adding more prayers than his request. He also placed his hand on the man's chest to add to his feeling that the Prophet cared for him.

I imagine that the young man felt how cool the Prophet's blessed hand was and it gratified him. He must have remembered this feeling for the rest of his life, as if the Prophet had just lifted it. Such touches by the Prophet were like keys with which he made hearts open up to him. Blessed that young man was by being close to the Prophet and by the Prophet's touch and prayer. Blessed is his question which gave such results.

As for us, we must learn this lesson and realize that Islamic advocacy is an act of love, and education is also an act of love. We will not be able to win people over to our message unless we touch their hearts with love.

4. Another very impressive aspect is that in his conversation with the young man, the Prophet relied on the social environment and its influence in shaping people's thinking. The Prophet was talking to a young Arab man who belonged to a nation that was known for the great value it attached to honour. It was an

environment where girls were buried alive for fear of the shame they might bring to their families. Nothing was more insulting to an Arab than a hint of dishonour. Hence, when the Prophet made the young man think about any of his very close relatives being involved in such an action, his sense of honour was aroused. We can imagine him perspiring as he listened to the Prophet's questions. His face must have looked red hot as he listened. Hence, his answer was immediate: "No, by God, messenger of God, may I sacrifice my life for you."

We might imagine, by way of contrast, that if the same question is put to someone who lives in a permissive society, his answer would have been: "It is her own private matter, and she is free to do what she likes."

In his education and in the way he presented his message, the Prophet took into account the background and environment of the person addressed. Thus he was able to quickly address the hearts and minds of his audience. Another example of such care is his conversation with a Bedouin who wanted to disown his son because he was black. The Bedouin imagined that the child was not his. The Prophet asked the Bedouin: "Do you have camels?" The man answered in the affirmative. The Prophet asked him about their colours. He said: "They are reddish in colour." The Prophet asked: "Is there among them any which is very dark?" The man confirmed that some of them were dark. The Prophet asked: "How come?" The Bedouin said: "It may be that a different trait was more pronounced." The Prophet said: "The case [of your son] is the same."⁷⁹ Thus the Prophet was able to remove the Bedouin's confusion and made him reconsider his decision about disowning his child. These questions were so convincing because they were addressed to a Bedouin Arab who tended his camels and knew which she-camel gave birth to which young camel.

In both these cases, the Prophet used the particular social environment of his interlocutor to arrive at strong personal conviction.

⁷⁹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 7314; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1500.

37. A Document Pledging Personal Safety

He tried to find his way through an armed battalion, with some of them checking his advance. But he was holding a document in his hand and he wanted to show it to the Prophet. He was encouraged to do so, particularly when he heard the Prophet as he declared: "This is a day of kindness and honouring pledges." Eight years had passed since that document was written. Now he is holding it and the scene of writing it clear before his eyes. What he is witnessing now is the very eventuality he expected on that day.

He remembered the day when people from the Quraysh arrived at the encampment of his tribe, the Mudlij, at Qudayd. They announced that the Quraysh has placed a prize of one hundred camels on Muhammad's head and a similar one on Abu Bakr's head, dead or alive. The Prophet and his companion had left Makkah, aiming to reach Madinah and the Quraysh set a chase to capture them, but they managed to elude their chasers. Hence, the prize to enlist the support of all Bedouin tribes across the 500-kilometre desert routes. As a brave, hard fighting Bedouin, he was eager to win this prize. Bedouins in Arabia were very keen to own camels and they took pride in them. To them, camels represented wealth.

One or two days later, this brave Bedouin was with a group of his friends when one of their tribesmen came over and said: "I have seen three people passing along the coastal route, and they may be Muhammad and his friends." He immediately realized that what the man said was true and that they took the unfamiliar coastal route to evade their chasers. He also felt that it would not be difficult for him to capture them and win the great prize. He wanted it all for himself. He gave the man a look signalling him to say no more. He also said to him: "No, they are some of our people who have gone a short while ago searching for a stray camel." The man said: "Perhaps you are right."

This Bedouin stayed a little longer with his friends. He did not want to arouse their suspicion by rising too soon. He then went home and told his maid to prepare his horse and take it out and wait for him behind a nearby hill. He then slipped out through a

back door, fully armed. He also carried a small bag which contained his divining arrows. This was a way pagan Arabs used to determine the action they should take. He carried his spear, but held it down so that nobody would notice him. When he met his maid holding the rein of his horse, he took out his divining arrows and drew his lot, but it came out that he should not pursue the travellers. He hated that but his desire to win the prize was more powerful than his pagan faith. He rode his horse and went at speed. The area was solid ground and the horse could travel fast. He soon spotted them.

He went on and was soon close to them. He even overheard the Prophet reciting the Qur'an. The Prophet did not turn back, but Abu Bakr turned back often. When Abu Bakr saw Suraqah, he said to the Prophet: "Messenger of God, here is someone catching up with us." The Prophet reassured him: "Do not grieve; God is with us." The Prophet then prayed: "My Lord, spare us this trouble as You wish. My Lord, let him fall down." Suddenly, the horse that was galloping over the hard ground now felt its legs sinking into the ground as they would sink in mud. The horseman fell off, totally amazed to see his horse with its legs deep into the ground. The area was very familiar to this Bedouin and he knew how solid the ground here was. He realized that what happened to him was the answer of the Prophet's prayer.

He called out to the Prophet: "Muhammad, I know that this is all your doing and that you have prayed against me. Now pray to God to spare me this trouble. By God, I shall do you no harm and I will never do you anything you dislike." The Prophet prayed for him and his horse pulled itself clear.

When the horse pulled its front legs from the ground, a column of bright smoke went up high into the sky. When the Bedouin saw all these signs, he felt that Muhammad's message would be triumphant and he would overpower all his enemies. He did not know what sort of person the Prophet was, but he thought that in his triumph, he would remember that a Bedouin from the Mudlij tribe chased him to try to hand him over to the Quraysh. He feared that he would then punish him severely. Therefore, the Bedouin thought it wise to try to get himself a promise of pardon in advance. He shouted out to the Prophet and his companion: "I am Suraqah ibn Ju'shum. Stop for me, I want to speak to you."

The Prophet told Abu Bakr to ask him what he wanted. Suraqah said: "I would like you to write for me a pledge of safety between us." The Prophet and his companions stopped while Suraqah rode his horse and joined them. He said to the Prophet: "Your people have placed a prize on your head." He gave them all the news in circulation and offered them food and materials, but they took nothing from him. He then said: "You will soon pass by my flocks of sheep and camels. Take of them whatever you wish." The Prophet said: "We do not need any of it." Suraqah said: "Then give me your orders." The Prophet said: "Keep our secret and do not let anyone chase us." The Prophet ordered `Amir ibn Fuhayrah, Abu Bakr's ally who was with them, to write a note for Suraqah, as he requested. Suraqah took the note and put it in his bag and went back. When he met people heading that way, he persuaded them to go back. He said to them: "You are spared chasing them this way. You know that I well know the area and I can follow people's traces. I have gone all along this side and there is nothing here." Reassured, the chasers would go back to try other routes.

Years passed and the news of Islam travelled between Makkah and Madinah. Everyone heard of the Prophet's victory, how he took over Makkah peacefully, defeated the Hawazin tribe at Hunayn and besieged Taif. Suraqah knew that people were embracing Islam in large groups. He took the Prophet's note and went to Makkah, hoping to meet the Prophet. He arrived at al-Ji'irranah, close to Makkah, where the Prophet was. There was a group of the Ansar horsemen around him. He went through, and they tried to stop him with their spears. They asked him what he wanted, but he went on until he was close to the Prophet who was riding his she-camel. His lower garment was lifted a little and his lower leg was visible. It looked shining white. Suraqah lifted the note in his hand and said: "Messenger of God, this is the note you wrote me. I am Suraqah ibn Ju'shum." The Prophet said: "Yes. This day is a day of truth, kindness and honouring pledges. Come closer." Suraqah drew closer to the Prophet and declared his belief in Islam. He must have had a mixture of feelings, delighted at being so close to God's messenger, amazement of the scene around him, and awe inspired by the Prophet. He tried to remember something to ask the Prophet, but his mixture of feelings left him confused. He, therefore, only asked the following question: "Messenger of God,

some stray camels may come to my area and I would have filled my pond for my own camels. If I allow such stray camels to drink my water, do I receive a reward?" The Prophet said: "Yes, you get a reward for any kindness done to any living creature."⁸⁰ The Prophet welcomed Suraqah and smiled at him. He did not remind him of anything that happened on the day of their earlier meeting, leaving it as if it did not happen.

I am absolutely certain that Suraqah felt then that he had no need of that note he carried. He was absolutely safe because he was dealing with none other than Prophet Muhammad, the man with a sublime character.

When Suraqah went back home, he sent the Prophet a few of his camels as a charity.⁸¹

* * *

This story fills me with amazement, on several counts. Firstly, Suraqah's request that the Prophet should give him a safety note when both were standing in their respective role. Has anyone ever heard of someone setting chase to capture a fugitive, but he then requests a promise of safety from the one being chased everywhere?

Secondly: Suraqah started his day eagerly chasing the Prophet and intending to kill him or take him captive and hand him over to his enemy. Yet by the end of the day, he was protecting him, sending his chasers away.

Thirdly: The contrast between the two meetings is most telling. The first was in the middle of the desert, with the Prophet alone with his companion, guide and servant, using two camels. All tribes were on the hunt for them. The second meeting was when the Prophet was surrounded by ten thousand fighters in his army.

⁸⁰ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 17581 & 17584; Ibn Majah, *hadith* No. 3686; Ibn Hibban, *hadith* No. 542.

⁸¹ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2439, 3615; 3652 & 3905; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2009; al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il al-Nubunwah*, vol. 2, p. 487; al-Tabarani, *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabir*, *hadith* No. 6601-6603.

Arabian tribes were sending delegations to meet him and declare their loyalty to him.

Fourthly: Imagine the contrast between Suraqah, chasing the Prophet and hoping to get the prize of 100 camels, and Suraqah sending a number of his own camels to the Prophet hoping to receive God's reward for his charity.

Finally: How short eight years can be. They pass like a flash, but in the Prophet's own life, those were years full of activity. They witnessed the Battles of Badr and Uhud, the encounter of the Moat and the signing of the peace agreement at al-Hudaybiyah. They were ultimately crowned with the victory granted by God that meant the transformation of Makkah into the city of Islam. And Suraqah lived through all these wonderful events.

38. Nothing Better

He was a young man of good physical ability and good faith. He passionately loved the Prophet and he was so eager to earn God's pleasure. He therefore wanted to utilize all his energy and put all his talent into what he loved and yearned for. He resolved to exert himself in worship. His intention was to spend his night in voluntary worship and to fast every day for the rest of his life. He began his effort with great resolve. He read the Qur'an in full every night and fasted every day.

His father then found him a young intelligent woman who belonged to a good family and arranged their marriage. After the wedding, the young man just did not pay much attention to her and the marriage remained unconsummated, because he was busy with his worship.

One day, the father visited his daughter-in-law. He asked her: "How have you found your husband." She said: "He is a very good man: he does not sleep at night and he fasts every day. He has not consorted with us or been to our bed since our wedding." `Amr, the father, was very angry with his son and rebuked him for what he did. He said to him: "I have married you to a Muslim woman from a noble family and you have turned your back on her. You also did this and that." `Abdullah, the son, did not pay much attention to his father's discourse. He enjoyed his worship and felt that he could go on without disturbance, because that was the consummation of his life. When nothing changed, the father went to the Prophet complaining about his son's behaviour.

The Prophet went to see `Abdullah at his home and was received in his sitting room. `Abdullah placed a cushion made of hide and filled with fibre for the Prophet to sit on, but the Prophet did not sit on it. The cushion was in between them. The Prophet said to him: "`Abdullah, I have been told that you spend the night in voluntary worship and you fast during the day. You also said that you will fast your days and stay up in worship every night for the rest of your life." `Abdullah answered: "Yes, messenger of God. I said this, and may I sacrifice myself for your sake. I only wanted to do what is good and right, and I can easily do this." The Prophet

said: "You cannot do that; so do not do it. Should you continue to do this, your eyes will sink in, and you will be weak. For myself, I spend some time of the night in worship, but I also sleep. I fast on some days and do not fast on others. You better do the same: spend time in worship and have some sleep; fast on some days and do not fast on others. You owe a duty to your soul; a duty to your eyes; a duty to your body; a duty to your wife; a duty to your children; and a duty to your guests. It is sufficient for you to fast three days every month, because a good deed is rewarded ten times its value and fasting three days a month is like fasting your entire life." `Abdullah said: "Messenger of God, let me enjoy my time and my strength. I can do better than that." The Prophet said: "Then fast five days a month." He said: "Messenger of God, let me enjoy my worship. I can do better." The Prophet said: "Then seven days." He said: "I can do better." The Prophet said: "Then fast one day and leave fasting two days." `Abdullah again said: "Messenger of God, I can do better than that." The Prophet said: "Then do the best form of fasting in God's sight, which was the practice of Prophet David. He was the most devout person, and his fasting was the best fasting. Do not go beyond this." `Abdullah asked: "How did Prophet David fast, messenger of God?" the Prophet said: "He fasted one day and did not fast the next. When he promised, he fulfilled his promise, and when he fought, he did not turn back." `Abdullah said: "How can I guarantee that, messenger of God?" He meant commitment not to turn away in battle. He then added: "I can do better than that, messenger of God." The Prophet said: "There is nothing better. May he not fast who wants to fast always." He repeated this three times.

The Prophet then said to him: "Read the Qur'an once a month." He meant that he may read it at that rate in his voluntary night prayer. `Abdullah said: "Messenger of God, I can do better than that." The Prophet said: "Then read it once every 20 nights." Again `Abdullah said that he could do better. The Prophet said: "Then once every ten nights." He said: "Prophet, I can do better." The Prophet said: "Then once every seven nights, but do not do more than that." He said: "Messenger of God, let me enjoy it better, as I can do more." The Prophet refused that, and said: "The fasting God loves best is David's fasting, and the prayer He loves best is David's prayer. He used to sleep half the night, stand up in

worship one-third of the night and goes to sleep for another one-sixth. Every type of action has a period of enthusiasm, and every enthusiasm is followed by slackening. Whoever makes his period of slackening one in which he sticks to my way [i.e. my Sunnah] follows the right guidance; and whoever slackens into some other way leaves himself in ruin.” He then added: “You do not know, but you may attain to old age.”

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr lived long indeed, and he reached 90 years of age. He was too weak to continue with what he committed himself to do. In his old age, he used to read one-seventh of the Qur'an for his family during the day so that he could do lighter night worship. When he wanted to build his strength to fast, he would remain a few days without fasting, counting his days, and then he would fast a similar number of days. He did not wish to abandon any part of what he agreed with the Prophet.

‘Abdullah used to relate this to people and add: “I made it hard and it was made harder for me. I attained what the Prophet mentioned [meaning old age]. Had I accepted the concession God’s messenger advised, it would have been better for me than my family and my property. I am now an old, weak man but I do not like to abandon what God’s messenger had told me to do.”⁸²

* * *

This is the story, and several lessons could be learnt from it:

1. Once more we note the close relationship between the Prophet and his companions. He features very prominently in their lives. Here we see ‘Amr ibn al-‘As complaining to him about a private matter that took place between him and his son. The Prophet gives the matter much importance and goes to see ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr at his home to deal with the problem and show him the right way. This is just an example of how the Prophet interacted with their problems.

⁸² See: Ahmad, *hadith* No. 6760-6762 & 6867; Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 1131, 1152, 1153, 1974-1980, 5052 & 5199; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1159; Ibn Khuzaymah, *hadith* No. 2110 & 2152; al-Nassa’i, *hadith* No. 2388-2404.

2. The Prophet did not just listen to the father's complaint of what his son was doing and give him advice or an order to carry to his son. He went himself to see `Abdullah and ascertain his condition and motives. When `Abdullah confirmed what his father said and provided the motive by saying: "I can well do this", the Prophet started his advice. We note that this advice took into account `Abdullah's basic point in his argument, namely his feeling that he could continue with this sort of devoting himself to worship. The Prophet started by saying: "You cannot do that." He then explained the physical consequences that result from such action: "Should you continue to do this, your eyes will sink in, and you will be weak." He followed this by stating the example he himself provided: "For myself, I spend some time of the night in worship, but I also sleep. I fast on some days and do not fast on others." If the one who has ordered us to fast and do night worship fasts on some days but not on others, and spends time in night worship but goes to sleep, we must certainly follow his example. The Prophet further added an explanation of the detriment to `Abdullah's life that would result from persisting in his action. Much of the duties he owed to himself, his wife, children and guests would be lost. All this the Prophet explained in short sentences that addressed the psychological motives behind his action. He thus gave `Abdullah the right perspective and explained its impact on personal and family life. Such is the fine style of the Prophet and his comprehensive perspective.

3. The scene reflects the importance the Prophet attached to maintaining balance in human life. He said to `Abdullah: "You owe a duty to your soul; a duty to your eyes; a duty to your body; a duty to your wife; a duty to your children; and a duty to your guests." Here the Prophet points out the various aspects of human life and the importance of maintaining balance between them. He indicates the danger involved in tilting the balance towards one aspect so as to leave other aspects deprived. All these are duties that should be fulfilled together.

4. This *hadith* includes a clear evidence of Muhammad's prophethood. This dialogue between him and `Abdullah ibn `Amr took place when `Abdullah was around thirty years of age. The Prophet told him that he might yet "attain to old age", and `Abdullah lived around sixty years after the Prophet's indicative

words. He died after completing 90 years. May God bestow His blessings upon Prophet Muhammad who never spoke out of his own fancy.

5. We note the solid commitment the Prophet's companions demonstrated. `Abdullah's conversation with the Prophet ended with a suggested commitment which was to fast on alternate days, and to read no more than one seventh of the Qur'an in his night worship. When he attained to old age and became much weaker, he continued to fulfil his commitment. Although all such worship was voluntary, he felt that he should not fall short of what he agreed with the Prophet. We wonder if such was the Prophet's companions' commitment when it applied to recommended practices, what sort of commitment they had towards the obligatory ones.

6. One must admire the parental insight shown by `Amr ibn al-`As. As an experienced man, he did not fail to visit his son and enquire about his situation. He did not stop looking after his son when the latter reached a certain age. He continued to follow up on his son's situation to be reassured about his family life. He appears to be keen to rectify any defect, if one was to be found. Perhaps he sensed that there might be some imbalance in his son's life. Hence, he checked on him by questioning his daughter-in-law. Her answer shows that she was a wise and confident woman. She referred to a private relationship that most women would be too shy to speak about. But she put her complaint very skilfully, clothing it with highlighting her husband's virtues: "He is a very good man: he does not sleep at night and he fasts every day. He has not consorted with us or been to our bed since our wedding." Her words reflect her intelligence, good manners and awareness of her legitimate rights. It also shows that `Amr had selected a very good wife for his son.

39 The Ash`aris

They were a group of good people who left their homes to join the Prophet in Madinah. They were devoted to worship. Their homes were recognized at night because the Qur'an was recited there in their voluntary night worship. They combined kindness with generosity and unselfishness. When food was scarce in their community, they would bring all they had, put it together, and then divide it equally between them. They were poor, but they endured their poverty with resignation.

Less than two years before he passed away, the Prophet called on his followers to prepare for war against the Byzantine Empire, as he received news that the Byzantines intended to invade the Muslim state. This involved marching over 700 kilometres across the desert in the summer time when the heat was intense. Departing from his usual practice, the Prophet declared his destination and the aim of the expected battle. It was to secure the northern areas of the Muslim state which were threatened by one of the two superpower of the time. Needless to say, all those who joined the army needed to have transport, which was mostly camels and horses. The Prophet urged the people to contribute to the war effort, enlisting in the army and providing transport for themselves and others who did not have transport.

This group of people, the Ash`aris, who had emigrated from Yemen, were keen to join the army, eager to fight for the cause of Islam and hoping to achieve martyrdom. They went to the Prophet requesting him to arrange transport for them. It so happened that when they spoke to the Prophet he was very angry at something they were totally unaware of. Perhaps in his full preoccupation with raising this army, which was the largest he ever raised, he was dealing with some pressing difficulties. Their request, coming on top of whatever had angered him, invited an angry response. He said: "No, by God, I shall give you no transport." They left feeling very sorry, and fearing that they might have done something that displeased God's messenger.

Sometime later, Bilal called and asked them to come back to the Prophet. When they went to him, they saw five large and

healthy camels. He gave them the camels and said that they were theirs to ride during the forthcoming expedition. They were full of gratitude as they took them away to see about their other preparations. Then some of them said: "The Prophet might have forgotten that he had sworn earlier that he would not give us any transport. If we do not remind him of it, God may not grant us any blessings. We will never do well in future." They went back to him and said: "Messenger of God, you had sworn earlier not to give us transport, but now you have done. We thought you might have forgotten your oath." The Prophet welcomed them warmly, as it was his usual manner. He said with a smile: "It is God, not me, who has given you your transport. It is my way that if I say an oath and then I see a better course, I will, God willing, opt for the better course and atone for my oath." They were well pleased with what the Prophet said and felt reassured.⁸³

* * *

This is an inspiring story with several points to dwell upon:

1. The Prophet's anger was simply an aspect of his humanity. It simply confirmed the most important aspect of how he fulfilled the task assigned to him: "Say: Limitless in His glory is my Lord. Surely I am only a man and a messenger." (17: 93) He might react in anger. He will then show his community what should be done in cases of anger. He might forget, and he will subsequently legislate for his community what is to be done in such cases. In all, the Muslim community will appreciate the great divine wisdom in giving them a messenger from among themselves, who has the same instincts, feelings and reactions as they have, to provide them with guidance for all situations.

2. The Prophet's anger in this situation was the exceptional case that highlights his normal state of being very much in control of his emotions, particularly anger. Such exceptional cases illustrate that the Prophet's normal forbearance and forgiveness in situations

⁸³ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3133, 5518, 6718 & 6721; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1649. Al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 11, p. 108; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 6, p. 239, vol. 9, p. 646 & vol. 11, p. 604 & 611.

that caused anger was not due to his having an angelic nature that was immune to feelings of anger. He felt angry when there was a situation that caused anger. Thus he reflected a purely human nature. However, he was able to control himself when he was angry. He suppressed angry feelings, forgave whoever caused such anger and dealt with them kindly. His sublime character enabled him to be in control of his feelings in most cases.

3. The Ash`aris did not do anything that could cause anger. They did not request the Prophet to give them money or luxuries. Nor did they hope for any gain they might have from him. They simply wanted to join a campaign of jihad, willing to sacrifice their lives for God's cause. They requested some transport to carry them to the battlefield where blood is shed and lives are lost. How come that the Prophet was angry with them? How could this contrast with his exemplary forbearance when some rough Bedouins rudely asked him gifts and he gave them? They would then ask him for more and he would give them, responding to their overbearing attitude with cheerfulness and tolerance. On one occasion, they pressed him too hard, and he gave them the mildest of reproaches, saying: "Had I had as many cattle as the trees in this woodland, I would distribute them among you, and you will not find me stingy or cowardly."⁸⁴

This was a case of the Prophet's behaviour with people who were close to him: he loved them and they loved him; he tolerated their slips and excused them and they did the same. To others he gave more generously and treated them more gently. This was not because the latter were dearer to him, but because they were more in need of kindness and forbearance, because they were newcomers to Islam, or because they did not know the Prophet well. He said: "I may give to one man and leave another with nothing. The latter may be dearer to me than the one to whom I give. I give some people because I see worry and anxiety in their hearts, and I leave others because their hearts are full of goodness and contentedness."⁸⁵ This included gifts in kind, treatment and manners. Therefore, if we let our nature dictate our behaviour, we need to be cautious with those who might not excuse our slips.

⁸⁴ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2821.

⁸⁵ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 27 & 923; Muslim, *hadith* No. 150.

4. The Prophet gives us a great ethical example. He at first declares an attitude, and confirms it with an oath, making clear that he would not give those people any means of transport. Yet he retreated from this position very quickly. His later position was both spontaneous and well considered. He saw no problem with changing his position after he had declared it and sworn to it. He did so simply because a better option was open to him and he did not hesitate to choose what was better.

We need to reflect long on this, because we often find it difficult to retreat from a position which we may have stated, reacting to circumstances, although a clearly better option appears to us. We find it hard that people should think that we have yielded grounds. This happens all the time, even in the case of parents with children, teachers with students, bosses with subordinates.

How often a person may stubbornly hold to a wrong position, even though he realizes that it is detrimental to his own interests, simply because Satan works on his pride and shows him that retreat means weakness. Prophet Muhammad, who taught pure goodness, made his position absolutely clear: "It is my way that if I say an oath and then I see a better course, I will, God willing, opt for the better course and atone for my oath."

5. Then consider those Ash`ari people and their purity. With such spirits, they are like angels walking among people. Theirs was absolutely pure faith. They felt no grief towards the Prophet when he was angry and denied them their request, swearing that he would give them no transport. Yet they greatly felt for him and honoured his word. They blamed themselves for not reminding the Prophet of his oath. They considered that they were responsible to do so and returned to apologize for that omission and remind him of his oath. That was a brilliant sense of responsibility and a case of pure trust in the messenger and his message.

Such was Muhammad, (peace be upon him), the man God had chosen to deliver His message to mankind, and such were those whom He had chosen to be his companions: "Muhammad is God's Messenger; and those who are with him are firm and unyielding towards the unbelievers, full of mercy towards one another. You can see them bowing down, prostrating in prayer, seeking favour with God and His good pleasure." (48: 29)

6. The Prophet's initial response was preceded by many others that showed his care and love of his companions. They were certain that his kindly care would be resumed. Taken in the context of earlier caring situations, this attitude did not cause a shock or represent a blow. It was taken within its particular circumstances and caused little grievance. It was merely drawing a little from a long history of care and love.

40. The Bedouin with Two Plaits of Hair

He was a Bedouin who lived in the Nu`man valley, which opens up an expanse of land, surrounded by high mountains that appeared to reach up to the sky and carry it. He rode his camel and aimed towards Madinah, covering the distance in eight days. He neither had a financial business in Madinah, nor relatives whom he wanted to visit. What he travelled for was to meet the man who claimed to be God's messenger. He wanted to hear from him personally what his prophethood meant and what the truth of his message was. He simply wanted to make an enlightened decision about Islam. His name was Dimam ibn Tha`labah.

When he arrived in Madinah, he went directly to the mosque, sat his camel by the door and tied its rein. He was a rough Bedouin with long curly hair which he made in two plaits. He went into the mosque where the Prophet was with a large number of his companions. He could not distinguish the Prophet, so he asked: "Which of you is `Abd al-Muttalib's son?"⁸⁶ When the Prophet sat with his companions, he was just one of them, undistinguished by any visible sign. Hence, people could only point him out to the questioner by his appearance. They said: "He is the white reclining fellow over there." He went up to him and addressed him as he would address anyone: "`Abd al-Muttalib's son?" The Prophet said: "Yes, I am `Abd al-Muttalib's son." The man said: "Muhammad?" The Prophet said: "Yes."

Needless to say, this start was rather discourteous, almost rude, but the Bedouin followed it with an even more brusque address. He said: "I am putting to you some questions, and my questions are going to be hard. Do not take this against me." The Prophet, who taught pure goodness, said: "I shall take nothing against you. You may put whatever questions you have." There was nothing in his faith that he wanted to conceal. It was an absolutely clear and straightforward faith. The man started to put his questions which indicated a bright mind and systematic thinking. The dialogue proceeded as follows:

⁸⁶ `Abd al-Muttalib was the Prophet's grandfather, but the Arabs often called a man as the son of his grandfather.

Dimam: Who created the sky?

The Prophet: God.

Dimam: Who created the earth?

The Prophet: God.

Dimam: Who hoisted up these mountains and placed in them whatever there is?

The Prophet: God.

Dimam: I ask you by the One who created the sky and the earth and hoisted the mountains and placed in them whatever they contain: is it God that sent you as a messenger to all mankind?

The Prophet: Indeed He did.

Dimam: I ask you by the One who sent you: is it God that ordered you that we must worship Him alone and discard those idols our forefathers have worshipped alongside Him?

The Prophet: Indeed He did.

Dimam: By the One who sent you: has God ordered you that we must offer these five prayers every day and night?

The Prophet: Indeed He did.

Dimam: By the One who sent you: has God ordered you to take this charity from those of us who are rich and distribute it to our poor?

The Prophet: Indeed He did.

Dimam: By the One who sent you: has God ordered you that we must fast the month of Ramadan every year?

The Prophet: Indeed He did.

Dimam: By the One who sent you: has God ordered you that we must offer the pilgrimage to the House, if we are able to do so?

The Prophet: Indeed He did.

Dimam: Then I declare that I bear witness that there is no deity other than God and that Muhammad is God's messenger. By Him who sent you with the message of the truth, I shall not add to these duties and shall not omit any. My name is Dimam ibn Tha'labah of the tribe of Sa'd ibn Bakr. As for those abominations, we used to avoid most of them in the past, but under Islam we will be even more so.

Dimam then went back to his camel, untied it, rode it and went back home. He had no further business in Madinah.

When he went away, the Prophet said to his companions: "The man has learnt well. If this man with two plaits keeps his word, he will be in heaven."

The Prophet's companions were amazed at the insight developed by this Bedouin. 'Umar said: "I never saw anyone putting his questions as clearly and concisely as Dimam.

When Dimam arrived at his place, his people welcomed him, but the first thing he did was to shatter the aura of holiness they attached to their idols. He said very clearly and loudly: "Evil are both al-Lat and al-'Uzza." [These two were the most important of their idols]. They were shocked at his daring to abuse the idols they worshipped. They tried to scare him of what might happen to him when he incurred their anger. But he had already discarded such beliefs and become a Muslim with clear vision. He said to his people: "By God, these idols can do neither benefit nor harm to anyone. God has sent a messenger and revealed to him a book to save you from the evil you have been in. I bear witness that there is no deity other than God and that Muhammad is God's servant and messenger. I have come back, having met him, and I will explain what I want you to do and what you must refrain from." He continued to argue with them and persuade them for several hours. By the evening they were all Muslims. The Prophet's companions

heard of what he did and admired him. Ibn `Abbas said: "We never heard of a delegate better than Dimam ibn Tha`labah."⁸⁷

* * *

The story raises several points worthy of discussion:

1. Dimam ibn Tha`labah felt that it was exceedingly important that he should do all he could to establish the truth about what to believe in. Therefore, he undertook his long journey to make sure of what he had heard of Prophet Muhammad and what he advocated. He wanted to take a clear decision about his old beliefs. This shows that he was serious about religion, eager to follow the right faith. He was also serious about his responsibilities when his decision was made. When he met the Prophet and put his questions to him, he ascertained the truth of the Islamic message.

2. We note how the Prophet lived with his companions as one of them. Nothing distinguished him by appearance or clothes. Hence Dimam needed to ask his first question: "Which of you is `Abd al-Muttalib's son?" The Prophet in fact forbade his companions to stand up around him like other people did.⁸⁸ He disliked the practices of arrogant leaders. As he continued to be very close to his companions and one of them, he was able to correct their perceptions and behaviour. They loved him as they loved no one else.

3. Dimam's trip to see the Prophet took place sometime after Makkah had fallen to Islam and people started to embrace Islam in groups. By that time, most parts of the Arabian Peninsula were under the Prophet's rule. Nevertheless, Dimam addressed the Prophet in this fashion, requiring him to tolerate his hard questioning. Yet the Prophet, with his fine manners and easy nature, accepted Dimam's proud attitude and forceful address. He wanted him to speak naturally, knowing that he had an instinctive

⁸⁷ See: Ahmad, *hadith* No. 2254, 2380 & 22719; Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 63; Muslim, *hadith* No. 12. Al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 169; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 1, p. 106 & 150.

⁸⁸ Ref: Ahmad, *hadith* No. 22181; Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 5230; Ibn Majah, *hadith* No. 3836.

dislike to affected humility and unnecessary flattery. In his dealing with all people, the Prophet respected his interlocutors, and never tried to show any superiority, or to force them into humility. They faced him with dignity and left him feeling more dignified and confident. Had he been rough in his attitude, people would not have loved to be always with him.

4. When Dimam said that he had some hard questions, the Prophet said: "You may put whatever questions you have." This answer expressed the Prophet's attitude towards everyone who wanted to know the truth and to find guidance. No question was restricted, because there is nothing in the religion preached by Prophet Muhammad that we are ashamed to discuss. There is no issue that cannot be enquired into or explained. There is no obscurity or paradox that cannot be understood by human intellect. Hence, the Prophet left the door wide open before his interlocutor, telling him to put all his questions. He reassured him that he would not take his hard questioning against him. A Muslim who combines knowledge of his faith with trust in its truth will not be embarrassed by any question put to him.

5. Dimam declared his acceptance of Islam and believed in its truth. However, this was not the result of the Prophet's acceptance to answer him under oath. It may be said that a person who makes a false claim can easily swear to it. That the Prophet accepted the oath merely confirmed several aspects of evidence that he was truly God's messenger and Dimam was aware of them. The first was his knowledge of what the Prophet taught and advocated. It was Dimam that mentioned the various aspects of Islam, as communicated by the Prophet's companions who travelled to different parts of Arabia advocating Islam and explaining its message. Dimam was happy to accept the Prophet's confirmation of these, realizing that what the Prophet taught indicated the truth of his message.

Another piece of evidence was the fact that he saw the Prophet and spoke to him. The Prophet's face told everyone who met him that he was a truthful person. `Abdullah ibn Sallam was a learned Jewish rabbi who lived in Madinah and was aware that the advent of the last divine message was close at hand. When the Prophet arrived in Madinah, he went to see him. He said afterwards: "When

I saw his face and looked at him, I realized that his was not the face of a liar.”⁸⁹

Furthermore, the Prophet was well known throughout Arabia that he always said the truth. Hence Dimam asked him to speak to him under oath. He realized that a man who told the truth in his normal conversation would never lie under oath; a man who said the truth to people would not tell a lie and attribute it to God. All these factors made Dimam believe every word the Prophet said.

6. Dimam’s last words to the Prophet after he had mentioned the major duties of Islam, just before he left were: “By God, I shall not add to these duties and shall not omit any.” He thus made it clear that he would do no more than the obligatory, but he committed himself not to omit any of them. However, when he went back to his people, he addressed them and urged them to embrace Islam. He argued with them and taught them what he learnt. They responded favourably and embraced Islam.

Dimam realized that advocating Islam and making it known to people is not included in the ‘addition’ he said he would not do. He knew that it was part of the duties he committed himself to fulfil. Hence, he went into advocating Islam straightaway. This was an aspect of his clear understanding. This is what the Prophet referred to when he said of him: “The man has learnt well.”

⁸⁹ Ref: Ahmad, *hadith* No. 22668; al-Tirmidhi, *hadith* No. 2485; Ibn Majah, *hadith* No. 1334 & 3251; al-Hakim, *Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 4, p. 160.

41. A Night in the Prophet's Home

It was just a night in the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), serene and quiet, like many nights in his blessed and happy life. However, it was watched by a wakeful, intelligent eye, and then its events were reported to us, minute by minute, from the moment of sunset until the break of dawn. The report is so accurate that we almost witness the night ourselves.

It began when the Prophet's uncle, al-`Abbas ibn `Abd al-Muttalib, sent his son, `Abdullah, with an errand to the Prophet. `Abdullah went to the Prophet in the evening and he found him sitting with his companions in the mosque. He could not speak to him as he saw him very busy until the Maghrib prayer was due. When the Prophet finished the obligatory prayer, he started on his voluntary prayers until the next obligatory prayer, Isha, was called. When the Prophet finished it with the congregation, he offered four more *rak'ahs* of voluntary prayer. By the time he finished these, he was the only one left in the mosque. The Prophet then went home. `Abdullah ibn `Abbas followed him there and told him his father's message. When `Abdullah wanted to leave, the Prophet said to him: "Stay with us tonight, son." The Prophet was that night at the place of Maymunah, his wife and `Abdullah's maternal aunt. That invitation was so welcome to `Abdullah and he very much wanted to stay. After all, this was the home of his cousin, the Prophet, and his aunt, Maymunha. "A person's uncle is the same as his father",⁹⁰ and "A maternal aunt is a mother."⁹¹

Ibn `Abbas went in with the Prophet, resolving not to sleep so that he could see what the Prophet did in his night worship. In order to be absolutely sure not to miss anything, he asked his aunt to wake him up when the Prophet woke up.

The Prophet sat with his wife for an hour or so, before going to bed with her. They had only one pillow: the Prophet and his wife used its length and Ibn `Abbas used its side. He stayed up hoping

⁹⁰ Related by Muslim, *hadith* No. 983.

⁹¹ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 931; Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2700; Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 2278.

not to miss the time when the Prophet would rise for his night worship, so as to see what he will do.

At midnight, the Prophet woke up. He looked at Ibn `Abbas and said: "The boy is asleep." He sat up, wiping the effect of sleep off his face. He then lifted his eye to the sky, contemplating the greatness of God's creation in the stillness of the night. He recited the last ten verses of the third surah which start as follows: "In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are indeed signs for men endowed with insight, who remember God when they stand, sit and lie down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: "Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. Limitless are You in Your glory. Guard us, then, against the torment of the fire. (3: 190-191)

The Prophet then took a hanging waterskin and poured some of the water in a jug and performed his ablution in full, but using little water. It was a cold wintery night. He then brushed his teeth, and wore a top garment before starting his prayer.

Ibn `Abbas was watching him closely all the while. When the Prophet started his prayer, Ibn `Abbas rose and started to stretch like someone who has just woken up. He did not want the Prophet to know that he was watching him. He then performed his ablution like the Prophet did and went up to join him in his prayer. He stood to the Prophet's left side. The Prophet put his hand back and held him, moving him behind his back so that he stood to the Prophet's right side. As he prayed, the Prophet continued to care for Ibn `Abbas, putting his hand on his head at one time, or touching his ear on another. Ibn `Abbas said: "I realized that he only did this to make me relax in the darkness of the night.

Ibn `Abbas monitored the Prophet's prayer that night. He started with two short *rak`ahs* before adding eleven more *rak`ahs*. This completed 13 *rak`ah* of voluntary night worship. It was a relaxed prayer that took a considerable part of the night, estimated by Ibn `Abbas at one-third of the night. That was equivalent to the length of the Prophet's sleep earlier.

Ibn `Abbas learnt what the Prophet said as he opened his prayer, after starting with *Allah akbar* [God is supreme]. He said: "My Lord, all praise is due to You: You are the sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all creatures in them. All praise is due to

You: You are the light of the heavens and the earth and all in them. All praise is due to You: You are the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all therein. You are the truth; Your word is the truth; and Your promise is the truth. Heaven is true; hell is true, and the Day of Judgement is true. My Lord, I surrender myself to You; I believe in You; I rely on You; to You I turn; I stand on Your side; and to You I turn for judgement. You are our Lord and to You we all return. My Lord, forgive me what I do in private and what I do in public; forgive me what I did and what I may do. You are my God and there is no God other than You.”

During his prostration, the Prophet included this prayer: “My Lord, place light in my heart; light in my hearing; light in my sight; light to my right; light to my left; light beneath me; light above me; light in front of me and light behind me; and give me great light.”

When he finished his prayers, the Prophet went back to bed and slept soundly. Ibn `Abbas could hear his breathing. When Bilal called the Fajr [i.e. dawn] prayer, the Prophet rose, prayed two *rak`ahs* and went out to the mosque and led the Fajr prayer.⁹²

* * *

Such was the Prophet’s night, full of light, and we see great and clear signs in those hours of darkness.

1. This *hadith* should be included as evidence of Muhammad’s prophethood and that whatever he delivered to us was true and coming from God. A person who wakes up in the middle of the night, leaving his warm bed, when there is no one around other than his wife and a young lad, both of whom appear to be asleep, and stands up to offer such prayer with full devotion must be fully absorbed in his case. He must have attained the highest degree of certitude. There could be no affectation in what he did. In private places and times of rest and relaxation, a person behaves spontaneously. His inner convictions take charge of his actions.

⁹² See: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 117, 138, 183, 992 & 6316; Muslim, *hadith* No. 763; Abu Dawud, *hadith* No 1356 & 1365; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 1, p. 212, 239 & 288; vol. 2, p. 482 & vol. 11, p. 116.

What the Prophet did in his nights is solid evidence of the truth of what he has delivered as God's message. He was the most unlikely person to invent something false. May God shower peace and blessings on Muhammad, His truthful messenger.

2. This *hadith* is a practical confirmation of what the Prophet said about himself: "My perfect delight is prayer."⁹³ How much did the Prophet pray that night? He spent all the time between Maghrib and Isha in prayer, and after Isha he prayed four long *rak'ahs*. By the time he finished there was no one in the mosque. He later offered 13 *rak'ahs* taking up around one-third of the night. His was a very close bond with prayer so that he hardly finishes a prayer before he starts a new one, eager to offer more.

We should remember that this great Prophet rose for his prayer having committed no error or wrong action. He was fully aware of God's forgiveness of whatever slip he might have done, as stated in the Qur'an: "God will forgive you all your faults, past and future, bestow upon you the full measure of His blessings and guide you on a straight way." (48: 2) What urged him to offer such prayers is a totally different concept. He wanted to live the meaning of being God's servant, feel His love and enjoy addressing and appealing to Him and thanking Him for His great favours. Hence, his prayer was that of one who enjoyed prayer and was absorbed in it. He found comfort in it. When he faced a problem or difficulty, he would ask Bilal to call for prayer, saying: "Bilal, give us our comfort with prayer."⁹⁴

3. This story took place in the ninth year of the Prophet's immigration to Madinah, or even later, when Makkah had fallen to Islam and the whole of Arabia was under the Prophet's rule. Nevertheless we see that the Prophet continued to lead a simple life, with very little to live on. There was nothing of worldly comforts in the Prophet's home. There was nothing other than an old waterskin and one bed. Ibn `Abbas was not given a bed or a pillow to sleep on. He slept on the same pillow as the Prophet and his wife. They used its length and he used its side. And with all the

⁹³ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 3940; al-Nassa'i, *hadith* No. 3939; al-Hakim, *hadith* No. 2676.

⁹⁴ Related by Ahmad, *hadith* No. 23088 & 23154; Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 4985 & 4986.

details of the night that have been reported, there is no mention of any food being served or eaten by anyone.

Prophet Muhammad strove hard to establish the divine faith so that he would put mankind on the right course with regard to their religion and their worldly matters. He departed without having taken anything from people for his own comfort. It is just like God says of his prophets: “No reward do I ask of you, my people, for this [message]. My reward rests with Him who brought me into being. Will you not, then, use your reason?” (11: 51)

4. We note with great interest the balance in the Prophet’s life and the complementarity of his roles. Out of his home, where Ibn `Abbas found him at first, he was attending to people’s affairs, fulfilling his duty towards his community. When he was back at home, he sat with his wife discussing home matters and fulfilling his duty towards his family. He then went to sleep to give his body its rest. After that, he woke up to pray, fulfilling his duty towards His Lord. All these roles were noted during this single night, and he acted as a leader, a husband, a worshipper and an ordinary human being.

5. We also note the Prophet’s welcome of his cousin `Abdullah ibn `Abbas ibn `Abd al-Muttalib and his invitation to stay the night. He spoke to him as a father, saying: “Stay with us tonight, son.” He then shared the pillow the Prophet and his wife slept on. Even in the darkness of the night, the Prophet took care of Ibn `Abbas, wiping his head and holding his ear to give him reassurance. In every one of these aspects there was a friendly and loving touch that was imparted to al-`Abbas, the Prophet’s uncle, when his son went back and related to him what happened during that night. We note here that the Prophet was honouring his uncle by giving such a welcome to his young son. It is the Prophet that said that “a person’s uncle is the same as his father.”⁹⁵

6. Ibn `Abbas shows sharp intelligence at an early age. He was around 12 years of age when this event took place. Yet he made his resolve, taking care to watch the Prophet’s night in full. He was determined not to sleep throughout the night, although the type of life people led at the time made sleep at night an urgent need.

⁹⁵ Related by Muslim, *hadith* No. 983.

Moreover, he behaved impeccably well to monitor what happened throughout the night. The blessing of his action is reflected in the fact that we have a full view of the Prophet's nights and how he spent them.

42. Traces of the Days of Ignorance

He was the fourth man to embrace Islam. He came to Makkah during the early days of Islam and met the Prophet, greeting him by saying: "Peace be to you, Prophet." He then declared his acceptance of Islam. He saw the Prophet's delight clear in his face. The Prophet asked him: "Who are you?" He said: "I am Jundub, from the tribe of Ghifar." He was better known as Abu Dharr, and he used to say: I am one-quarter of Islam. Only three people embraced it before me.

That he was an early believer gave him a special status. When the Prophet immigrated to Madinah, Abu Dharr was close to him. The Prophet would start by greeting him when he was present, and he would enquire after him when he was absent. Yet despite this close status to the Prophet, he was involved in a case that left its deep mark on him. He remembered it for the rest of his life. There was some friction between him and one of the servants, and they were involved in a slanging match. The servant's mother was a black foreign woman. Abu Dharr said to the servant, "You, son of a black woman", imparting shame to him on that account. The man was angry and went to the Prophet complaining and requesting the Prophet to ensure that amends were made.

When Abu Dharr met the Prophet, he asked him: "Abu Dharr, have you exchanged abuse with that person?" Abu Dharr confirmed that he did. The Prophet asked him: "Did you put him to shame on account of his mother?" Again Abu Dharr confirmed that, and added: "If a person abuses men, they abuse his father and mother." The Prophet said: "Abu Dharr, you have lingering traces of the days of ignorance." These words greatly affected Abu Dharr. The days of ignorance were those of idolatry when people worshipped statues made of stone, mud and wood. He was one of the first four people to embrace Islam. How could he retain traces of ignorance? He therefore asked the Prophet: "Messenger of God, am I in this old age of mine retaining traces of ignorance?" The Prophet said: "Yes, indeed, in this old age of yours. Your servants are your brothers whom God has placed under you. Whoever has a brother under him should give him to eat of the food he eats and

dress him of the clothes he wears. He must not assign to him work that he might be unable to do. If he does, he should give him help.”

Abu Dharr understood the Prophet’s words and clearly felt what they signified. He retained the lesson to the last day of his life. He spent his final days at a place called al-Rabadhah, which is a desert area close to Madinah. Al-Ma`rur ibn Swayd met him and he was accompanied by his servant. Abu Dharr had a suit of two garments, but he wore one and gave the other to his servant. Al-Ma`rur felt that was strange, as it was not customary for people to give their servants the same type of clothes they wore. He said to him: “Abu Dharr, if you take this garment your servant is wearing and put it on, you would have a suit. You can give your servant a different garment.”

Abu Dharr said: “I will tell you the reason. I once had an argument with one of my brothers during the Prophet’s lifetime. We exchanged verbal abuse. As the man’s mother was a foreigner, I shamed him on her account...” He told his interlocutor the story and what the Prophet said to him. Al-Ma`rur’s amazement was dispelled, and he was impressed with Abu Dharr. He reported the story which gives us some important points to reflect upon.⁹⁶

* * *

1. The Prophet was accessible to all his companions at all times. This man who was abused on account of his mother put his complaint to the Prophet and showed him that he was hurt. The Prophet gave his complaint full attention and remonstrated very strongly with Abu Dharr. The fact that the man was a slave and with dark complexion was no barrier to deny him access to the Prophet or to make his complaint. The Prophet was close to all people.

Moreover, the Prophet nurtured into people good self esteem and impressed on them that they should know their rights and their duties. Hence, when this man had an argument with Abu Dharr, he

⁹⁶ `Abd al-Razzaq, *Al-Musannaf*, *hadith* No. 17965; Ahmad, *hadith* No. 20461; Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 30, 2545 & 6050; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1661; Abu Dawud, *hadith* No. 5157

felt that he was equal to him. This is understood from Abu Dharr's expression: "I exchanged verbal abuse with a man", which means that both hurled insults on each other.

When the man felt that Abu Dharr had gone too far, insulting him on account of the colour of his mother's skin, which was nothing to be ashamed of, he put his complaint to the Prophet. The Prophet took the matter seriously and remonstrated with Abu Dharr despite his great status as one of the very early Muslims.

Great indeed was the change Islam brought into the life of these people. Prior to Islam, this man who complained to the Prophet felt himself to be owned by his master. The words he complained of, and much worse, were hurled at him at all times and he could do nothing other than suppress his grief. Islam brought about total change, starting with nurturing man's feeling of dignity so that he knew his value and his rights. Mankind were elevated to a higher standard by the Prophet whom God sent as a manifestation of His mercy to all the worlds.

2. We note the forceful eradication of all racial prejudice, as it was realized that traces of it lingered on from pre-Islamic days. The Prophet's rebuke was very clear: "Did you put him to shame on account of his mother? You have lingering traces of the days of ignorance." Having a black mother is nothing to be ashamed of. She did not choose her colour, nor did Abu Dharr choose his white colour. Moreover, no one may put another to shame on account of his father or mother. No person chooses his parents. Therefore, to speak ill of someone's parents is to revert to ignorant practices. In those ignorant days prior to Islam, people took pride in their ancestry and abused others on account of their ancestors.

The thing to be ashamed of is not having a black skin, but reverting to ignorant practices. Hence, the Prophet's words hurt Abu Dharr, and he complained citing his old age and the fact that he had embraced Islam long time ago. He was one of the very early people to abandon the state of ignorance.

3. As the Prophet put an end to ignorant considerations that found pride in ancestry and race, he at the same time built a solid structure of brotherhood between Muslims. This is clearly noted in this *hadith*. The Prophet said: "Your servants are your brothers," but the way he said this in Arabic adds stronger emphasis. He then

added: "God has placed them under you." This was a reminder that their lot as servants was simply by God's will. The Prophet implied that God might have willed that you should serve them.

The Prophet then added: "Whoever has a brother under him should..." He re-emphasized the fact that it was all by God's will. Hence, people should recognize God's favours and blessings. If He has given you some of his creatures to serve you, these are your brothers. Although they are servants, their status of brotherhood remains intact. Hence, they are entitled to have their share of food and clothes, and kindly treatment in the work assigned to them. Above all, however, is that their feelings must be respected and nothing hurting should be said to them. We note the Prophet's concise expression and how he established the concept of brotherhood and the need to fulfil the obligations it implied. His style combined concise expression with fullness of meaning.

4. We cannot but admire Abu Dharr's implementation of the Prophet's orders. Towards the end of his life, he lived at al-Rabadhah, but continued to fully observe the Prophet's instructions. We note this in his report of the incident: "I had an argument with one of my brothers..." He referred to the man with whom he exchanged abuse as his brother, making clear that he understood and implemented the Prophet's words: "Your servants are your brothers." Moreover, he implemented the Prophet's instructions fully and literally, giving his servant half his suit. He could have given the servant clothes of the same quality, but he preferred to do what was better. In addition, the way he reported the incident a quarter of a century later indicated that it remained alive in his mind, as though it happened only the day before.

This was the practice of the Prophet's companions when they received his instructions and guidance. To them, his instructions meant practical and profound commitment for the remainder of their lives.

5. At the time when the Prophet forcefully and decisively put an end to all aspects of discrimination, even in their simplest forms such as an insult based on colour, there was no public opinion in favour of equality and no organizations advocating human rights. Throughout the world there were flagrant forms of racial discrimination. The Prophet went about eradicating such

discrimination 1400 years ago. Yet modern civilization only recently started to catch up with this guidance provided by Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. The United States continued to practise racial discrimination until the second half of the twentieth century. In 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested in the city of Montgomery because she refused to give up her seat in the bus so that a white passenger could sit. She was put to trial, and she lost her job as a seamstress in a local department store. Cases against discrimination laws continued in the United States until 1968.

The fact that the guidance given by Prophet Muhammad put in place the rules and legislation to rectify such social ills across the world provides yet another proof that what he advocated was revelation vouchsafed to him by God, the Creator of all who knows what is best for them all.

43. Abu Bakr's Daughter

“She is Abu Bakr’s daughter”. This is what the Prophet said with a broad smile on his face. He was admiring `A’ishah, her sharp replies and confidence as she defended herself and scored heavily against her opponents. He had heard what was said about her and to her and how she replied.

The story begins when the Prophet’s wives were in two camps. The first was `A’ishah’s camp which included Hafsa, Sawdah and Safiyyah on the southern side, and the other included Zaynab, Umm Salamah, Umm Habibah, Juwayriyyah and Maymunah [may God be pleased with them all] on the northern side. The Ansar who lived nearby, such as Sa’d ibn Mu’adh, Sa’d ibn `Ubadah and Abu Ayyub, used to send gifts to the Prophet. People realized that the Prophet loved `A’ishah in particular. Therefore, they were keen to send their gifts on the days of her turn, when the Prophet would be at her home. If someone wanted to send him a gift, he might delay it until the day of `A’ishah’s turn, feeling that the Prophet would be pleased.

The northern side met one day at Umm Salamah’s home, as she was their eldest and enjoyed a higher status with the Prophet. They told her that people are sending their gifts on `A’ishah’s days. We are like `A’ishah, we would like to have good things like `A’ishah does. Perhaps you may speak to God’s messenger to tell the people to send their gifts wherever he happens to be, with any of his wives. When it was Umm Salamah’s turn, she told him what his other wives said and requested him to speak to people concerning their gifts. The Prophet just turned away and did not make any reply. The following morning, they came to her and asked her what the Prophet said. She told them that he said nothing. They requested her to repeat the attempt. She waited until it was her turn again, and she repeated their message, but he did not give her any answer. They again requested her to repeat the attempt. On her next turn, she told him again, but he said: “Umm Salamah, do not upset me with regard to `A’ishah. By God, revelations were never vouchsafed to me when I was under the cover of any one of you except her.” Umm Salamah said: “I turn to God in repentance of doing anything to upset you.”

The others realized that she would never speak to the Prophet on this issue again. They sent to Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter, seeking to enlist her help, as she was the dearest person to the Prophet. They requested her to say to the Prophet: "Your wives appeal to you to give them justice with regard to `A'ishah." Fatimah did not do that for a few days. Then Zaynab bint Jahsh visited her and spoke to her about the matter. Fatimah promised to do it. She went to her father when he was at `A'ishah's home, reclining with her. He admitted her. She said that his wives sent her to appeal to him to ensure justice with regard to `A'ishah. The Prophet said: "Is it Zaynab who sent you?" She said: "Zaynab and others." He asked her: "Was she the one in charge?" She said: "Yes." The Prophet smiled and said: "Daughter, do you not love what I love?" She said: "Indeed, I do, messenger of God." He said: "Then love this one." He pointed to `A'ishah. Fatimah then left and went to his wives and told them what she said and what the Prophet said. They said: "You have not done us much good. Return to God's messenger and say to him that his wives appeal to him for justice concerning `A'ishah." She said: "By God, I will never speak to him regarding her."

They urged Zaynab to go and speak to the Prophet as she was his cousin. Her mother was his paternal aunt, Umaymah bint `Abd al-Muttalib. Moreover, she was close to him, competing with `A'ishah for his favours.

Zaynab went to him and sought permission to enter when he was still with `A'ishah, with her blanket covering them both. They were still in the same condition as they were when Fatimah spoke to him. She was angry as she went in. She said: "Messenger of God, your wives have sent me to you requesting fairness with regard to `A'ishah." She then insulted `A'ishah, but the latter remained silent, watching the Prophet and trying to read in his face and eyes what he thought of Zaynab's words. She then noticed that the Prophet was looking at her to see if she was going to answer Zaynab. She realized that he would not mind her replying and defending herself. She, therefore, answered Zaynab and was soon gaining the upper hand in their exchange. Her argument was so powerful that Zaynab became speechless. The Prophet smiled and felt pleased. He said: "She is Abu Bakr's daughter." Who could rival Abu Bakr's

intelligence, knowledge, powerful argument and strong personality? `A'ishah was his daughter, and people take after their parents.⁹⁷

* * *

We need to reflect on several aspects of this story:

1. We note first of all that beautiful feelings were apparent and well known. The Prophet's love of `A'ishah was not concealed. In fact it was known to all his companions, and they were keen to make their gifts to him when he was with his love.

The Prophet made this beautiful emotion known because it is natural. It indicates human fulfilment and proper emotions. Hence, love was left to flourish naturally. Then there came periods when this aspect of the Prophet's guidance was ignored. In some communities, people concealed even the name of their wives, and it became shameful for a man to be known to love his wife.

2. God's messenger was held in awe by all who saw him, and he was the leader of the Muslim community. Yet he allowed feelings and emotions to be expressed freely. As we have seen, Umm Salamah spoke out repeatedly, and Zaynab made her appeal, showed her anger and quarrelled. All this remained within the area the Prophet allowed. Had he so wished, he could have ended all this with a word or an angry look, but he was not dictatorial in his treatment. He dealt with all people with ease and kindness. Feelings were expressed right away, and the Prophet dealt with such feelings with the sort of kindness he ordered us to show. Thus, a wife will feel her humanity respected. She will not nurse hard and negative feelings that she might have to suppress.

3. We note how the Prophet dealt with errors in a realistic way and without exaggeration. What Zaynab did when she spoke harshly to `A'ishah and insulted her was an error. For this to happen in front of the Prophet and in `A'ishah's home when they were under one blanket was another error. These two errors could

⁹⁷ Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2580, 2581 & 3775; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2441 & 2442; al-Nassa'i, *hadith* No. 3944; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 5, p. 206 & vol. 7, p. 108; al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 15, p. 205.

have started a storm of anger and a very hard reaction. The Prophet, however, did not want to give the matter more than it deserved. He understood its motive, which is jealousy prompted by his wives' undoubted love. He, therefore, only gave `A'ishah the right to defend herself. He did not interfere, because interference might have escalated the problem, aggravated the errors and led to further consequences.

4. The Prophet's wives' appeal which they first requested Fatimah to make on their behalf, and was subsequently made by Zaynab, requested the Prophet to maintain justice between his wives. Can we imagine that this was addressed to the Prophet whose message is based on justice and who ensured justice to all? Who could maintain fairness if the Prophet did not? Who was mankind's best teacher of justice?

Compare this attitude of the Prophet with his anger when he was told that someone said about the way he divided the war gains after the Battle of Hunayn: "There is no justice in this division." He was so angry that his face looked like a red dye. He said: "Who will maintain justice if God and His messenger do not?"⁹⁸ Once a man said to him: "Muhammad, be fair." He said: "Who will be fair if I am unfair? I will end up in misery and loss if I do not maintain fairness and justice."⁹⁹

In this case with his wives, the Prophet was not angry. He simply put their statement in its proper perspective. He understood the reasons why they said it. His wives were the Mothers of the Believers, and far be it from them to accuse him of unfair treatment. They were simply motivated by jealousy and their eagerness to be with him. Hence, the Prophet was not angered by what they said, nor did he respond to their words or argue with them. He knew that they did not intend its literal meaning. He understood it and its background.

We need to put words within their contexts and understand why they are said, particularly between husband and wife. Sometimes a word is said out of place, but the result would be long hours of dispute about what is meant by it. It may lead to unhealthy

⁹⁸ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3150 & 4335; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1062.

⁹⁹ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3138; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1063.

consequences, although, taken within its right context, it would have been totally harmless.

5. The Prophet did not agree to his wives' request to tell his companions to send their gifts wherever he happened to be at home. It is not honourable for a person to make such a suggestion to other people, because it implied a request for gifts. This was beneath the Prophet (peace be upon him).

`A'ishah had no fault in the matter. She may not be blamed because the Prophet loved her, and she deserved his love. Could there be a better evidence of her being worthy of love than the fact that God blessed this love, sending some of His revelations to His messenger when he was with her, under her blanket. This was not done with any of his other wives. Therefore, the Prophet kept her free of blame. He said to his daughter, the best woman in the world: "Love this one." It is right that Muslims who love Prophet Muhammad should love her as their mother.

6. As we have said, the Prophet's wives acted within the broad area he allowed them. However, they were keen not to overstep their limit and do something that might upset him. After Umm Salamah spoke to him about the matter for the third time, he said to her: "Do not upset me with regard to `A'ishah." Umm Salamah immediately replied: "I turn to God in repentance of doing anything to upset you."

7. It remains for us to say that those ladies, the Mothers of the Believers, and our own mothers, might have had such disputes that reflected human nature. Yet they were the purest of women at heart. Zaynab, who had this dispute with `A'ishah and was so jealous of her, was questioned about her at the time when the false accusation levelled at `A'ishah was circulating. Her answer was so clear: "I protect my hearing and sight. I have known nothing of her other than what is virtuous."¹⁰⁰

Likewise, `A'ishah said about Zaynab: "I have known no woman better than Zaynab in her faith. She was the most pious of women, the most truthful, the kindest to relatives, the most charitable and the most eager to work and donate her earnings to

¹⁰⁰ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 2661; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2770.

charity. The only thing that might be said otherwise was that she was quick tempered at times.”¹⁰¹

May God bestow His blessings on His beloved one, Muhammad, the truthful messenger, and on the members of his household, and his wives the Mothers of the Believers.

¹⁰¹ Related by Muslim, *hadith* No. 2442.

44. The Blessed Woman

When the Prophet went on a trip, including his campaigns of jihad, he drew lots between his wives. The wife whose name is drawn would travel with him. She was a young wife who was much loved and reciprocated with great love. She was very pretty and loved everything that was beautiful and she was still in her teens. Therefore, she borrowed her sister's necklace to wear on this trip, although the trip was an expedition to confront enemies. Times were hard and resources scarce. In fact, this expedition was known as Dhat al-Riqā' because the Prophet's companions had to wrap their feet with cloths in order to be able to walk.

The Prophet returned to Madinah, but as he approached the city, he stopped near a hill overlooking the al-`Aqiq Valley. His wife, `A'ishah, lost her sister's necklace and she was very upset to lose it. She mentioned this to the Prophet, and he took care of the matter because he understood her feelings about the necklace, although it was worth no more than 12 dirhams. He sent a group of his companions, headed by Usayd ibn Hudayr, to look for it. He remained at this place waiting for them, and the army remained with him. When it was night and they had not returned, he stayed the night in his place, as did all the army. There was no water spring in this place, and they had no water. The Prophet's companions were concerned that the next obligatory prayer should fall due and they had no water for their ablutions. They felt the situation hard and they complained to Abu Bakr, `A'ishah's father. They said: "Do you see what `A'ishah has done: she caused God's messenger to stay here with the people, and there is no water in this place. People have not carried water with them."

Abu Bakr was very upset. He remembered an earlier time when she lost her necklace on the way back after the Battle of al-Mustalaq. On that occasion, she went looking for it and the army moved on, without noticing that she was absent. This led to the false accusation circulated about her by some hypocrites. That experience brought Abu Bakr and his family much distress. Now she has lost another necklace, causing the Prophet and the army to stay in their place, despite their shortage of water. He went into her tent and found her sitting, with the Prophet asleep, resting his head

on her thigh. He spoke to her angrily but in suppressed voice: "Will you cause trouble every time? You have detained the people for the sake of a necklace." He continued to rebuke her. Abu Bakr could be very sharp when he was angry. He said to his daughter whatever he said, but he also poked her side and she was hurt, but she could not move or sigh because she did not to disturb the Prophet. At the break of dawn, the Prophet woke up. It was time for prayer, and his companions searched for water but found nothing. They did not know what to do. The time range of the dawn prayer is short. At this moment, the Prophet received Qur'anic revelations providing the solution in such a situation: "Believers, when you are about to pray, wash your faces, and your hands and arms up to the elbows, and pass your wet hands lightly over your heads, and wash your feet up to the ankles. If you are in a state of ceremonial impurity, purify yourselves. But If you are ill, or on a journey, or if one of you has come from the toilet, or if you have been in intimate contact with women and can find no water, then have recourse to pure dust, passing therewith lightly over your faces and your hands. God does not want to impose any hardship on you, but He wants to purify you, and to bestow on you the full measure of His blessings, so that you may be grateful." (5: 6)

We can only imagine how pleased the Prophet and his companions were with this concession given to them by God to make things easier for them. They could use dust as a dry ablution before prayer when they had no water. They were very pleased with 'A'ishah and congratulated her for being the reason for this concession given to the Muslim community. The Prophet said to her: "Great indeed is the blessing of your necklace." Usayd ibn Hudayr came over to her and said: "How blessed you, Abu Bakr's family, are. May God reward you well! Whenever something stressful happens to you, God provides you with a way out and makes it a blessing for the Muslim community." Her father who strongly reproached her the night before came over. He was delighted with what happened through his daughter. He said to her three times: "By God, you are a blessed woman."

The Prophet and his companions performed the dry ablution and offered their prayers. This was the first time the Muslim community offered a prayer exercising this concession. When the prayer was over, they sent their luggage ahead of them. They had

despaired of finding the necklace after having spent all this time the day before looking for it. They felt that God had compensated them amply because the concession stood for the rest of time. However, when they got `A'ishah's camel to stand, they found the necklace underneath the camel.¹⁰²

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Here are some reflections on this story:

1. The Prophet was 60 years old at the time while `A'ishah was a teenager. Nevertheless he interacted with her distress. He fully appreciated her personal desire. The necklace might not have been valuable. Even her father rebuked her saying: "You detained the people for the sake of a necklace." But it was important for her, as it was her piece of jewellery. Hence, the Prophet shared her feelings and took care to look for it. This is another indication of how good a family man he was. In this case we see several aspects of his family care:

- i. He stayed at a place where there was no water just to look for the lost necklace.
- ii. He sent a group of his companions to look for the necklace where it might have been dropped.
- iii. What was more important was that he did not do that under stress. He was fully relaxed, as evidenced by sleeping well, with his head on her thigh. This is a condition that combines contentment, love and compassion.
- iv. At the end of a journey people are normally tired or exhausted. They may be psychologically drained and hardly able to endure more burdens. When the journey is an army expedition, the exhaustion is even greater. Yet in this condition, the Prophet appears the same: easy, gentle and caring. He is the kindest of people and

¹⁰² Ref: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 334, 3672 & 4607; Muslim, *hadith* No. 367; al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 58; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 1, p. 432.

his kindness is extended to all. No one was ever kinder to his family than the Prophet. The hard journey did not drain his kind spirit or dent his highly refined manners.

2. It is a fundamental rule of travelling in the desert: if a traveller has no water, he must not stay at a place where there is no water. The Prophet did not mean to expose his army to danger or hardship for the sake of a necklace. He stayed in that place to please `A'ishah. The people stayed with him although Madinah was not far. That place is only about ten miles from Madinah, and it is today within the city. Therefore, staying in that place was not hard for anyone. The Prophet's companions were distressed because they lacked the water for ablution when they wanted to pray. God made this incident a cause to grant His concession to all Muslims, permitting them to pray after performing the dry ablution if they have no water.

3. We note the sort of life `A'ishah, the Prophet's beloved wife, lived as she did not find a piece of jewellery to wear on this journey during which she would have him all for herself. Hence, she had to borrow a necklace from her sister, valued at 12 dirhams, equivalent to 38 grams of silver. When she lost it, she was in distress. This tells much about the Prophet's life. He did not try to take any money from people. He did not wish to live in luxury. He and his family lived a life of poverty, to the extent that the only piece of jewellery his favourite wife had was a borrowed necklace, worth no more than \$20 by today's prices. Yet he was the one who distributed large amounts of money, and his hand was more generous than unrestrained wind.

4. Our mother, `A'ishah, was a blessed woman. Whenever she was in distress, God provided her with a way out that became a source of blessing for all Muslims.

When the story of falsehood was circulated and people repeated false accusations against her, she was in great distress. Yet she endured that despite being young at the time. Then God sent down revelations declaring her innocence in the form of Qur'anic verses that Muslims continue to recite until the Day of Judgement. Yet the outcome of this was good for her and for the Muslims, as God tells us: "Those who concocted the falsehood were a band

from among you. Do not regard it as bad for you; indeed it is good for you.” (24: 11). On this occasion, she lost a necklace and was distressed. The Prophet stayed in place to search for it. Her father was upset. Then it was time for prayer and there was no water. God then gave the Muslims a way out, a concession that Muslims will continue to exercise until the Day of Judgement.

She joined the Prophet on his pilgrimage, and when she was close to Makkah, she started her period. She felt distressed and said to the Prophet: “I wish I did not come with you this year.” When the Prophet ascertained the cause of her distress, he said to her: “This is something God has made as part of women’s life, and it will not affect you. Do all the rituals the pilgrims are required to do except that you cannot perform the *tawaf*. Ever since that day, the Muslims benefit by this ruling which was given because of what happened to, and distressed, `A’ishah then.

Another aspect of her blessing was that the Prophet married her when she was still young, and she loved fun. The Prophet allowed her much so that her life with him confirmed that Islam is an easy and accommodating religion. He informed the followers of all other faiths that our faith is the easy one.

45. A Young Man and a Young Woman

The young man was around 19 years of age, very smart, full of vigour, of white complexion and fine bearing. He rode behind the Prophet on his she-camel, al-Qaswa', as they made their way from Muzdalifah to Mina during the Prophet's pilgrimage. When the Prophet performed his ritual of stoning at the Grand Jamrah at al-'Aqabah, he moved back towards the first Jamrah and said: "This is the place where the sacrifice may be slaughtered, but all Mina is a good enough place for slaughtering, so you may do your sacrifice where you are encamped." The Prophet then stood there with people around him. They asked him many questions about their pilgrimage duties and he answered them all.

She was a woman from the tribe of Khath'am, young and pretty. She came forward having a question which she put to the Prophet: "Messenger of God, the pilgrimage has been made a duty for Muslims when my father is an old man who will not remain steady on his mount. May I perform the pilgrimage on his behalf?" The Prophet said: "Yes."

In his position behind the Prophet, the young man who was the Prophet's cousin, al-Fadl ibn al-'Abbas, looked at her admiringly. She, in turn, looked at him and admired him. As she drew near, the Prophet looked back and saw al-Fadl looking at her. He put back his hand and held al-Fadl's chin, turning his face to the other side. When she was on the other side, the Prophet held al-Fadl's head and turned it round. His father, al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, saw it and said: "Messenger of God, you have twisted your cousin's neck." The Prophet said: "I saw a young lad and a young girl, and I feared Satan for them." He turned to al-Fadl and said: "Nephew, whoever keeps his hearing, sight and tongue under control on this day will be forgiven his sins."¹⁰³

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¹⁰³ See: Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 4, p. 54; Ahmad, *hadith* No. 2153 & 2884; Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 1854 & 6228; Muslim, *hadith* No. 1334; al-Nassa'i, *hadith* No. 2642 & 5391.

We may reflect on some aspects of this story:

1. The Prophet's general approach to correcting wrong behaviour. When he turned round and saw al-Fadl gazing at the woman, he turned his face away with his own hand. The action meant that the Prophet's hand touched al-Fadl's face. This was an action that was full of fatherly feelings. It could have never produced more than feelings of pleasure as al-Fadl must have felt close to his cousin, the Prophet. The Prophet could have told him off, ordered him to look away, or at least gave him a look of reproach, but the Prophet chose instead this gentle approach because he taught us that God rewards a general approach much better than he rewards a rough approach.

2. The Prophet took the necessary action to correct the wrong behaviour, but he claimed no credit for doing so. When he had to explain his action, he simply mentioned that he and the young woman might have yielded to Satan's temptation. He did not say: How could he do this when he is riding with me, in front of my eyes, when I have given him the privilege of being with me? Many people take such an attitude when errors are done in front of them, considering any error a personal affront. As a result, their personal pride and status overlap with the principle of counselling people against doing what is wrong. This complicates issues.

3. We cannot fully appreciate the Prophet's gentle approach on this particular occasion unless we look at it against its complete background. The incident took place on 10 Dhul-Hijjah, the grand day of the pilgrimage, when the Prophet was in a state of complete exhaustion. He had taken a long journey, from Madinah to Makkah, followed by days of hard work. The previous day was when the pilgrims attended at Arafat, and that was a full day of worship. During the night the Prophet marched from Arafat to Muzdalifah, then after dawn break from Muzdalifah to Mina. He was responsible for the large multitude of pilgrims travelling with him, and their numbers were estimated at 120,000. During all this time, the Prophet was on his full alert teaching and directing his companions, and with a sense that his role was coming to its end. All this drains energy, making a person react more quickly and perhaps give way to temper. Not so the Prophet: he continued to

show the best manners and perfect gentility in his teaching and guiding approach.

4. When the Prophet's uncle, al-'Abbas, said to the Prophet that he had twisted his cousin's neck, the Prophet gave him a prompt reply explaining his action. Yet when you closely examine this reply, you are filled with wonder as you find that every word was carefully selected. The Prophet first said: "I saw a young man and a young woman." In another version of the incident the Prophet's words were: "I saw a young lad and a young girl." This description indicates that the Prophet understood that such young people's desire was strong. It also implies some excuse for them as they were still lacking in life experience. The Prophet then mentioned that he feared for them, but he did not say: "I feared him for her, or I feared her for him." He feared for them both from an external enemy: "I feared Satan for them." This answer reminds us of Prophet Joseph's style when he was speaking to his father after the reunion of the family, referring in very general terms to what happened between him and his brothers. He did not say: "My brothers did this and that to me." He overlooked all this and said: "Satan had sown discord between me and my brothers." (12: 100)

5. We note that the Prophet took issue with his cousin, al-Fadl, in this gentle manner, but no report of this incident mentions that the Prophet took issue with the young woman, or that he said to her anything other than answering her question about her father's pilgrimage. Yet she was doing the same thing as al-Fadl was doing, looking at him as he looked at her.

The immediate answer is that the Prophet took issue straight away with his cousin because their relation would make al-Fadl accept the Prophet's action very willingly. As a young man related to the Prophet, he would accept all that the Prophet did without feeling any embarrassment.

By contrast, the young woman from the Khath'am tribe came to the Prophet and she was in awe of him. Perhaps this was the first time she met the Prophet and spoke to him. If he were to remonstrate with her or give her instructions, she might have felt very embarrassed, and tears might have filled her eyes. Therefore, the Prophet opted for the indirect approach with her. She understood what he did to his cousin and realized that he included

her in his worry as he said: "I saw a young lad and a young girl, and I feared Satan for them."

The question she put to the Prophet indicated that she was intelligent enough to fully understand and appreciate the Prophet's guidance. Refined indeed was the Prophet's approach to teaching and guiding his community.

6. The scene tells us that the Prophet was so close to people, having no barrier to separate him from anyone. A young woman was able to come so close to him and stand facing him to put her question. In that social environment, young women were very shy, but the Prophet's openness with people enabled her to come over and speak to him with full confidence.

7. We finally note that the very fact that the Prophet took al-Fadl with him on his camel was a fine touch. The Prophet thus made it clear to all people that he took care of young people and was keen to show them that they had their good status with him. He wanted to stress the close ties between generations of the Muslim community.

Al-Fadl was the eldest son of the Prophet's uncle, al-`Abbas, and taking him behind him on his camel was a gesture of good will towards his uncle. We may imagine that as al-`Abbas said to him: "Messenger of God, you have twisted your cousin's neck", he fully appreciated the Prophet's kindness. He did not say to him: "You have twisted my son's neck", but referred to his son as the Prophet's cousin. This is as if al-`Abbas, an old man at the time, was saying to all those around: Here is my nephew, God's messenger, and the one with him on the camel is my son. This is how close we are to him, and you see his kindness to us.

The Prophet always honoured his uncle al-`Abbas and took care of him. No wonder; it is the Prophet who said that "a person's uncle is the same as his father."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Related by Muslim, *hadith* No. 983.

46. Welcome to My Daughter

Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter looked very much like him in appearance, movement and posture. When anyone saw her rising, sitting, walking or talking, he would immediately see the close similarity between them. The Prophet's treatment of her reflected the finest level of parenthood. When she visited him, he would rise to receive her and would say: "Welcome to my daughter". He would then hold her hand, kiss her, and sit her at the place where he was seated so as to express his warm welcome and love. When he visited her, she would do the same: rise, hold his hand, kiss him and sit him where she was seated. This was a high standard of mutual love and respect between father and daughter.

During the Prophet's last illness, he sent to her to come over. She came walking just like he walked. This time the Prophet did not rise to welcome her as usual, for he was too weak to do that. His fever had drained his energy. Therefore, Fatimah bowed down and kissed him. He told her to sit to his right, as he was unable to rise and sit her in his place as he used to do.

Fatimah sat thus with the Prophet, and his wives were all present. The Prophet spoke to her and told her whatever he wanted. Then he signalled her that he wanted to say something private. She drew closer to him and he whispered something to her. His wives were watching and trying to divine the effect of this private talk on her bright face. She looked very affected by what the Prophet told her and she was soon weeping and her tears poured down. The Prophet's wives wondered at this secret that her father had given her and she was in such tears as a result. 'A'ishah said to her: "God's messenger has told you this secret ahead of us and you cry?" Had they known what he told her, they would have excused her and cried with her.

When the Prophet saw her in this state, he spoke to her again in whisper, and continued to do so until her face brightened and she laughed.

The Prophet's wives were full of amazement at the quick change of Fatimah's mood, switching from tears to laughter. 'A'ishah said: "I have never seen delight so close to grief. I used to

consider Fatimah as the most rational of women, but she appears to be just another woman [meaning in her quick switch of mood].” `A’ishah made this comment unaware of the cause of Fatimah’s change of mood. Had she known it, she would have fully understood and would have taken it as further evidence of Fatimah’s intelligence and her great love of her father.

When she wanted to leave, `A’ishah asked her about the secret that caused her to laugh after she had cried, requesting her to tell her what the Prophet said. Fatimah replied: “What a bad daughter I would be if I were to publicise the Prophet’s secret.” It was not long afterwards when the Prophet passed away. Sometime later, `A’ishah said to Fatimah: “I request you by the duty you owe to me to tell me what took place between you and the Prophet.” Fatimah obliged her, now that the secret was no longer a secret. All was known and there was little to hide. Hence, she said: “Now, I can. When he whispered to me the first time, he said that the angel Gabriel used to check reading the Qur’an with him once every year. He added: ‘This year he checked it twice with me. I think that my life is soon to end and that I will die of my present illness. Therefore, fear God and endure with patience, for I am to you the best of ancestors.’ Therefore, I cried as you have seen. He then whispered to me that I was to be the first member of his household to follow him. He added: ‘Will you not be happy to be the first woman in heaven?’ I laughed when he told me this.” `A’ishah realized then that Fatimah’s crying and laughing, keeping the secret when she kept it, and then telling it when she did were all testimonies to her great understanding, intelligence and great honour. May God bestow His blessings on the woman who was the best of all women in all generations, Fatimah, Prophet Muhammad’s daughter.¹⁰⁵

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¹⁰⁵ See: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 3624 & 6286; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2450; al-Tirmidhi, *hadith* No. 3872; al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 16, p. 5; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 8, p. 135.

Here are a few points to reflect upon:

1. The first thing to note is the emotional overflow evidenced by a declaration of parental love which is expressed by mutual visits, loving kisses, fine words, warm welcome and the mention, with pleasure, of the tie of parenthood: "Welcome to my daughter". Such a clear, varied and multiple expression of a parent's emotion makes the relation between parent and child very strong, healthy and beautiful. It also indicates a high standard of mental health and well balanced feelings.

Parents have natural love for their offspring, but some parents fail to give it proper expression to make their children enjoy it and feel its warmth. Some parents feel that their situation should be enough, and they may declare that and say: "Cannot my children see how hard I work? Is it not all for them?" The Prophet's behaviour with his daughter gives us a clear message that expressing parental love and meeting psychological needs are by no means less important than the fulfilment of other parental duties. When these are also fulfilled, they give the children a clear sense of dutifulness towards their parents and they realize what duty they owe them.

2. We also note that the Prophet's parenthood adds to the feelings of strong love a dimension of respect to his daughter Fatimah. This is reflected in his standing up to welcome her, holding her and sitting her in his place, and also in his doing all this in front of all his wives.

We should remember that the Prophet who showed all this respect to his daughter had lived in an environment that held women in great contempt. A daughter's destiny hovered between physical or mental infanticide, as the Qur'an mentions: "When any of them is given the happy news of the birth of a girl, his face darkens and he is filled with gloom. He tries to avoid all people on account of the [allegedly] bad news he has received, [debating within himself:] shall he keep the child despite the shame he feels, or shall he bury it in the dust? Evil indeed is their judgement." (16: 58-59) The Prophet, however, did not look at matters from a social perspective. He received divine revelations that set mankind on the right track and showed them the right path to follow. Hence, his parenthood provides lessons for mankind, showing them that children need to feel respect, because this helps to build their

characters, just like love helps to fulfil their emotional needs. The two together give them a healthy and well balanced and integrated personality.

3. We further note that the Prophet told Fatimah a certain secret which he told no one else. He did not give any hint of it to Abu Bakr, `Umar or `Ali, or to any of his wives. It was a secret that concerned him and her in the first place.

True parenthood is that which gives one's children a sense of importance, telling them of the concerns and problems faced by the parents. They will thus feel that they are close to their parents and they have their responsibilities. This builds their self confidence and makes them share the family concerns. On the other hand, when the father conceals his concerns from his children, they feel marginalized.

That the Prophet told his daughter this secret is just an aspect of the unparalleled close relation between God's messenger, the father, and his daughter, Fatimah.

4. Children grow up and our love for them grows. They are not dolls to play with when they are young and discarded when they are older. This scene of refined emotion, tenderness and overflowing love by the Prophet to his daughter Fatimah took place when she was 25, a mother of five children. We often omit to express our parental love of our grown up sons and daughters. We are more concerned that they should show us their respect and deference to our views. Will this scene of the Prophet's treatment of his daughter remind us of our duty towards our children when they have grown up?

5. That Fatimah was the only one to be given this news was to prepare her for the great tragedy. She was the one most concerned with it, and hers was the greatest loss. She was to lose God's messenger, her great and loving father who gave her the kindest and best of treatments. Can we imagine her feelings as she was looking at her father's face when he told her of his forthcoming death, as a result of his present illness? What went through her mind as she looked at his blessed face, realizing that he was in the final episode of his life?

The Prophet chose to tell her the news himself, so as to prepare her for the forthcoming event. When he passed away, she demonstrated fortitude, patience and resignation. She was with him as death was coming. She cried out: "How distressed my father is!" He struggled to say to her: "Your father will have no distress after today." When he died, she said: "O father, you have answered your Lord's call. O father, you are in the highest heaven. O father, to the angel Gabriel we leave you." When he was buried, she only said to the people: "Have you been happy to hail dust over God's messenger's body?"¹⁰⁶ She knew that they were not, and they only did it because this was the way he taught his community to do. All blessings and peace be to the members of the Prophet's family whom God has made pure.

¹⁰⁶ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 4462.

47. Have the People Prayed?

It was Wednesday, Maghrib prayer that falls after sunset, and the congregation listened to the Prophet's recitation as he calmly and slowly recited Surah 77. His was the best recitation, as he was instructed to "recite the Qur'an calmly and distinctly." (73: 4) No one in the congregation could have thought that this was the last time they would listen to his recitation of the Qur'an.

He led this prayer with his head wrapped as he was struggling against fever and headache. When he finished the prayer, he went home to lie on his sickbed. His pain was so severe, as he suffered double pain.¹⁰⁷ His fever was increasing, and his body was so hot that those who tended him felt it through the sheet covering him. He lost consciousness. Soon, the Isha prayer, the last of the day, was called. People gathered in the mosque and were waiting for him to come out. His family were around him waiting for him to come to. As they were looking hard at his blessed face, he opened his eyes and they saw his lips moving. They hearkened to hear the first word his blessed mouth would say. He simply asked: "Have the people prayed?" They told him that the people have not prayed and they were waiting for him. He said: "Put some water for me in the tub." They did and he washed his body, hoping that the cold water would relieve his fever. He strove to rise and go to his companions who were waiting. However, he fell down in front of his family and lost consciousness again. This happened four times: every time he came to, he asked whether the people have prayed. When he was told each time that they were still waiting for him, he asked for more water in the tub and washed his body and tried to rise, but he fell and lost consciousness. The people remained in the mosque waiting for God's messenger to come out and lead the last prayer of the day. After the fourth time, he realized that he could not go out to join them. He said: "Tell Abu Bakr to lead the prayer."¹⁰⁸

Abu Bakr led the prayer. He was a soft-hearted man who often wept when he read the Qur'an. A few nights passed, with Abu Bakr leading the prayers. His recitation and glorifications were heard by

¹⁰⁷ As reported in a *hadith* related by al-Bukhari, No. 5648; Muslim, *hadith* No. 2571.

¹⁰⁸ Related by Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 664; Muslim, *hadith* No. 418.

the Prophet as he was on his sickbed in his room adjoining the mosque. On the following Monday, Abu Bakr was leading the Fajr [i.e. dawn] prayer, reciting verses of the Qur'an distinctly and sometimes his tears overpowering him. The Prophet's companions were in rows behind him, feeling great sadness because of the Prophet's absence. As they were in their position, they were surprised to see the Prophet lifting the curtain on his door and looking at them. He saw them standing as he taught them to stand in close rows, calm and listening to the Qur'an, and their hearts united by mutual love. They were gathered to perform the greatest act of worship, led by his companion whom he had chosen to lead them.

As the Prophet looked at them, his pale, illness-worn face brightened and a smile of pleasure was all over it. His companions were so delighted as they looked at his face brightening. They could see nothing more pleasing to them than the Prophet looking at them and smiling. Abu Bakr stepped back to join the first row, thinking that the Prophet was coming to join the prayer, but the Prophet signalled him to remain in his position and signalled the people to complete their prayer. He then dropped the curtain and went in. That was the last time he looked at his companions and their last look at him. It was during their Fajr prayer, the last time the Muslims prayed when the Prophet was still alive among them. By mid-morning death approached, with its hard moments. The Prophet put his hand in a jug of water, wiped his face and said: "There is no deity other than God. Death has its throes. My Lord, help me through the throes of death."¹⁰⁹ The throes of death, however, did not stop the Prophet from giving his followers his best advice. He used his last moments to say to us: "[Fear] God; [Fear] God. Attend to your prayers; attend to prayers. Be kind to your slaves." He repeated this until it was clear that his heart was repeating it but he could hardly pronounce the words.¹¹⁰ This was the last advice the Prophet gave his community before he passed away.

¹⁰⁹ See: Ahmad, *hadith* No. 23220; Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 4449, Ibn Majah, *hadith* No. 1623; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 11, p. 362.

¹¹⁰ See: Ahmad, *hadith* No. 655 & 11725; Ibn Majah, *hadith* No. 1625 & 2697.

Thirteen years passed and Abu Bakr led the prayer in the Prophet's mosque for nearly two years. When he passed away, `Umar succeeded him. Then on Wednesday, 26 Dhul-Hijjah, people were gathered in the Prophet's mosque awaiting the Caliph who would lead the dawn prayer. `Umar arrived, wearing a yellow lower garment which he tied on his chest. The prayer was called and the worshippers stood in rows. `Umar stood at the place where Abu Bakr had stood eleven years earlier and the Prophet stood before them. When he was in prayer, Abu Lu'lu'ah, a Zoroastrian from Persia, attacked him and stabbed him more than once in his abdomen with a two-edged dagger. `Umar's tall body fell in the *mihrab*¹¹¹ and as he was falling, he said: "God's will must be fulfilled." (33: 37) `Umar, still bleeding and unconscious, was carried home. Before sunrise, he opened his eyes and looked at the people around him. He started to say something, and the people hearkened to hear what the wounded man was saying. His first words were: "Have the people prayed?"¹¹²

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We need to reflect on several points:

1. The first scene provides a clear evidence of the true status of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). At the moment when he regained consciousness, which was in fact the first loss of consciousness in the hour of his death, he uttered the words that expressed his most important concern. That was whether his community had offered their prayer to God, his Lord who sent him with His message. This moment of regaining consciousness is the moment when a person expresses his real concerns. All affected ones disappear. If a person spends all his life playing an affected role, he cannot maintain such affectation at such a moment. Hence I say that this scene and the subsequent ones are among the many

¹¹¹ The *mihrab* is the place in a mosque where the leader of the prayer stands.

¹¹² See: Al-Bukhari, *hadith* No. 198, 664, 665, 687, 2855, 3700, 4442 & 5714; Muslim, *hadith* No. 418 & 419. Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 2, pp. 152, 155 & 174, vol. 5, p. 216; vol. 7, pp. 62-70, vol. 8, p. 141 & vol. 10, p. 167. Al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 136. Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 3, p. 348.

shining aspects confirming that Prophet Muhammad never said a false word and his absolute certainty of his faith.

2. This scene is a most expressive declaration of the importance of prayer, which is the main pillar of Islam. That it was the first word the Prophet said when he regained consciousness; that he tried to rise even though the fever had totally weakened him and yet he washed his body three times hoping that he would be able to go out and lead the prayer; that he surveyed his community in their last prayer during his blessed life; that he continued to urge people to attend regularly to it in his last moments... all this makes attending to prayer the topmost priority of life. Could there be any greater evidence in support of this than that the Prophet should mention it and urge it in that condition, or that `Umar should remember it on regaining consciousness after he had been stabbed? He actually enquired about it and then offered the prayer and said: "A person who abandons prayer abandons Islam."¹¹³ It behoves everyone who loves the Prophet to wonder: such was the importance the Prophet attached to prayer; how much importance do we attach to it?

3. This scene provides a testimony by the Prophet confirming the great status of Abu Bakr. It was God's will and fine arrangement that the Prophet did not die all of a sudden. He was ill and his body weakened, and he was fully alert and in control of his faculties. He assigned the role of leading the prayer to his closest companions, stating this in words that admit no different interpretation: "Tell Abu Bakr to lead the prayer." Abu Bakr led the prayer for five nights, and the Prophet was at home next to the mosque, hearing Abu Bakr as he recited the Qur'an and glorified God. The Prophet did not only assign the leadership of the prayer to Abu Bakr at the first time he could not come out, but he also confirmed this at the time of the last prayer in the Prophet's life. Abu Bakr was leading the prayer when the Prophet came out and he wanted to give up his position to the Prophet but the Prophet signalled him to continue. No Muslim could imagine that the Prophet would assign the leadership of the prayer to Abu Bakr

¹¹³ Malik, *Al-Muwatta'*, vol. 2, p. 54; `Abd al-Razzaq, *hadith* No. 581 & 5010; Ibn Abi Shaybah, *hadith* No. 38222, Ibn Sa'd, *ibid*, vol. 3, pp. 350-351.

when his companions were all there, if any of them was more acceptable to God than him.

`Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's beloved cousin, made a great statement when he said: "Your Prophet, the Prophet of mercy, was not killed, and he did not die suddenly. He was ill for several days and nights. The caller for the prayer would go to him and announce the prayer, but he ordered Abu Bakr to lead the prayer. He always saw me in my place. When he passed away, we considered our situation and chose for the management of our affairs the one the Prophet chose to manage our religion for us."¹¹⁴

4. An advocate of God's message is required only to present it to people. He is not required to make people believe in it. However, his delight is great when he realizes that his efforts have yielded their fruit and people have accepted the divine message. Hence, this was clearly visible in the Prophet's face when he lifted the curtain on his door and saw his companions following his guidance and implementing his Sunnah. His face beamed with delight, despite the debilitation caused by his illness.

5. We note how the important concerns were transmitted by the Prophet to his companions. `Umar did not see the Prophet when he said, "Have the people prayed", when he regained consciousness. Yet `Umar said the same words when he himself was in the same position, after he was stabbed and lost consciousness. He did not say these words to follow the Prophet's example, but he had the same concerns as the Prophet. This is manifested in the fact that both said the same words in the same situation, thirteen years apart.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Bushrah, *Al-Amali*, vol. 2, p. 43; Ibn `Asakir, *Tarikh Dimashq*, vol. 42, p. 442.

